Six Swedish educators' views on rap music as an educational tool

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates six Swedish educators' approaches and working methods regarding rap music as an educational tool. There may be a strength in incorporating rap music in schools. The aim of the paper was to investigate how rap music can be used as a pedagogical tool in the Swedish educational system. The following research questions were posed: *1) How can rap music be used in an educational context to describe exclusion*; and *2) How can the use of rap music help students in school lessons?* Through six unstructured qualitative interviews with educators, the themes that emerged showed that it is important to talk about exclusion and see the individual from a critical pedagogical approach, where rap music can be a key to reaching young people. The findings showed that the educators see possibilities in using rap music in their respective activities, mainly to talk about rhythm and rhyme in the Swedish language but also as a discussion topic in a more social science context. It can also give the lessons a clearer intercultural perspective in education. The explicit expression of the music genre rap emerged throughout the interviews with the educators. A practical implication of this study is that music, especially the subgenre gangster rap, is an aesthetic expression that stands for more than just musical expression which may be considered as an educational tool to reach young people.

Keywords: Controversial music, Critical pedagogy, Exclusion, Hip hop pedagogy, Pedagogical tool, Rap music, Teachers.

Highlights of this paper

- This study investigated six Swedish educators' approaches and working methods regarding rap music as an educational tool.
- The findings showed that the educators see strengths in using rap music in their respective activities, mainly to talk about rhythm and rhyme in the Swedish language but also as a discussion topic in a more social science context.
- Rap, as an aesthetic expression that stands for more than just musical expression and can be seen as an education tool to reach young people.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The dope head is standing and picking one of the locks

My homies' mum hides the Systembolaget bag

Welcome to my areas

In and out, in and out of the prison system

How politicians forgot the postcode

Welcome to my neighbourhood"

(Canatan, Carmona, & Stakset, 2012)

The existence or otherwise of gangster rap is often debated in the media. The music genre's links to the rise in gang crime across Sweden are a major contributing factor. A ban has recently been introduced on playing rap music, including at a leisure center in Jönköping. Salihu (2021) book on the so-called Järva network and its escalating conflict between the criminal gangs, *The Death Squad and Shotaz*, describes, among other things, rappers Yasin's and Einar's links to criminal gangs.

Swedish rappers such as Einar, AntWan, and Yasin are still very popular among both primary and secondary school students. Thus, the new Swedish so-called gangster rap seems to be the genre that many children and young people listen to. Seidefors (2023) Nordic Head of Music at the streaming service Spotify, explained the following in the music magazine (Seidefors, 2023).

Meanwhile, hip hop has had another incredible year in Sweden – AntWan became the first Swedish hip hop artist to sell out the Avicii Arena and at Way Out West, the 100 playlist took over one of the biggest stages with a tribute concert that featured both new and established hip hop artists. The cultural imprint of Swedish hip-hop is also reflected in Wrapped, as this year's top three artists are hip-hop.

(Seidefors, 2023).

In this study, the concept of rap music will be interspersed with gangster rap and hip hop. Hip hop is an umbrella term for various pillars of culture, of which rap is one. Gangster rap is a development of rap whose purpose is to describe a reality that is regularly perceived as provocative, oftentimes with violence, crime, and sexism in the lyrics. All of these attributes can be easily traced back to the rappers who appear on social media. Young people can relate to the commercial attributes worn by many rap artists (Anderson, 1993).

If school students are challenged to write their own rap lyrics, the teacher can encourage them to discuss what is appropriate to write about and how a text can be structured (e.g., rhyme and chorus). There can be a benefit in discussing the lyrics of the Swedish gangster rap with older students. Apart from the fact that many lyrics are about making money quickly, preferably with violence and drugs involved, there are also lines of text that touch on how anxiety ridden gang environments can be. Extensive descriptions have been provided on how alienated many feel in the suburbs and that several feel like second-class citizens. Because rap songs are not primarily meant to be sung, more like spoken, it is a unique form of poetry (Anderson, 1993).

Research in the US shows that incorporating hip hop into education can give a voice to marginalized youth in

society. Christopher Emdin, a professor at Columbia University, has launched a pilot project with rap artist GZA from the world-renowned, New York–based hip hop collective Wu Tang Clan to teach science through hip hop. Christopher Emdin (2013) claimed that teaching can be facilitated with the help of hip hop and that it is important to allow young people's way of looking at the world into the classroom. Christopher Emdin (2013) argued there are similarities between science subjects and rap music in the sense that both areas want to explore the world—for example, by allowing students to write *rhymes* about what they are expected to learn and letting them move freely in the classroom while discussing with classmates. Here, Christopher Emdin (2013) explained there is a benefit in teaching difficult subjects if it is done in a more alternative way that suits the students (e.g., in a hip hop way; Christopher Emdin (2013)). This is also supported by Lee (2020) who described hip hop as a powerful tool for building bridges. Lee (2020) expressed that hip hop can be useful both culturally and creatively in reaching hard-to-reach students..

To better understand the individuals who feel marginalized and the situation many live in, it may be important to talk about the texts:

> *Easy to be disappointed in yourself when you talk to the wall in a cell.*
> *I am the social issue, who grew up to be a rebel.*
> *When portraying reality as it is, controversial.*
> *Dad I'm trying to write to you but I can't get a word down.*
> *Could it be because my mum put the food on my table?* (Mahmoud, 2023).

The rise of gangs in Sweden is increasing, and the news is showing how new shootings and explosions are occurring throughout the country. Hip hop culture could pedagogically build bridges between educators and the particularly vulnerable areas and create a context for young people (Emdin, 2017). It is important that children and young people learn to feel a sense of belonging, and rap music can then become a voice of recognition (Joosteen, 2024). Hip hop and gangster rap influences can be used in adult education because of the great impact it has on urban youth and young adult life in America (Guy, 2004). Thus, it can be interesting to view rap music as something more than a provocative music genre that should be banned. One possibility might be instead to see it as a genre of music that wants to tell a story.

1.1. Aim and Research Questions

Based on this short backdrop, it appears there may be a strength in incorporating rap music in schools. Thus, the aim of the paper was to investigate how rap music can be used as a pedagogical tool in the Swedish educational system. The following research questions were posed: *1) How can rap music be used in an educational context to describe exclusion*; and *2) How can the use of rap music help students in school lessons?*

2. BACKGROUND

In recent years, Swedish gangster rap has attracted attention for its connections to criminal networks and its influence on youth culture. The journalist Emil Arvidson (2023) described how contemporary rap often depicts violence and exclusion; at the same time, like all art, it exaggerates, provokes, and tests boundaries. In this context, Minister of Justice Gunnar Strömmer has emphasized the need for preventive measures in particularly vulnerable areas, such as places with low socioeconomic status and high crime rates (Swedish Police Authority, 2024).

Historically, hip hop has served as a voice for marginalized groups. In the same way that jazz once sparked moral panic and racialized reactions, today's drill rap sparks debate. Stuart (2023) described drill as an expression where young people sell their exclusion through uncensored content on social media. Many Swedish rap artists are

finding new ways to communicate through their own news channels, where an increased presence on social media has fundamentally changed Swedish youth culture (Jackson & Cakar, 2023).

Swedish artists such as The Latin Kings were early in putting the suburb at the center of Swedish hip hop, which today is reinforced through platforms such as TikTok (Lundström, 2023). Several reports, including by Salihu (2021) show how Swedish rappers have increasingly become actors rather than observers in gang-related conflicts, a development reminiscent of the rise of gangster rap in the 1980s in the US (Kubrin & Nielson, 2014). African American culture has often become synonymous with something dangerous and irrational, and the white majority would like to control it (Guy, 2004).

Despite the moral criticism, rap music also has an educational value. Hip hop pedagogy is based on Paulo Freire (1975) idea of a critical pedagogy where teaching is based on the students' own experiences. Researchers such as Abrahams (2005) and Parmar (2010) believe that analyses of rap lyrics can open conversations about social justice, identity, and exclusion, something that the Swedish National Agency for Education highlights as important for the development of intercultural competence (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022).

Research in Sweden by, among others, J. Söderman (2007) and Sernhede and Söderman (2010) show how informal learning through rap music supports self-expression and language development. The genre has parallels to the Swedish folk education tradition where young people in marginalized areas act as cocreators of their education through podcasts and study circles, for example (Uhnoo & Sernhede, 2022).

Although rap music contains problematic elements, such as violence, sexism, and drug liberal messages, the importance of creating *safe spaces* in education, where these themes can be critically discussed, is emphasized (Gayle, Cortez, & Preiss, 2013). Studies from the US (e.g., Meacham, Meacham, Thompson, and Graves (2019)) show that hip hop as a pedagogical tool promotes linguistic and cultural competence across class boundaries. In summary, both Swedish and international research show that rap music, despite its controversial position, has the potential to be used as an educational tool. If it is used in a critical and reflective way, it can contribute to a more inclusive, democratic, and relevant teaching. Evans (2019) in turn, argues that the epistemology of hip hop can and should have a clear place in 21st century pedagogy.

Exclusion has been an established concept in social policy debate and research for many years. For the past 15 years or so, the concept of exclusion has come to refer to segregation based on factors such as immigration and unemployment. Living in exclusion has been equated with having come to Sweden as an immigrant or refugee. Being socially excluded means that an individual does not have access to all social environments like the rest of the population (Ekholm, 2018). School is the best arena for meeting people regardless of class or ethnicity, but this requires that schools and society dare to discuss how schools should cater to students from different cultures. There have been attempts to counteract segregation through so-called student transfers, but these measures have not always been successful, as students from excluded schools have been forced to adapt completely to the norms of others and have been under-prioritized. This can lead to another form of exclusion where students experience another form of subordination (Ekholm, 2018).

This is supported by Bunar (2015) who argued that it is important to recognize the values and norms of a minority. By demonstrating the right to exist, the individuals living in exclusion become part of the community. Salihu (2021) described the conflict between the two criminal gangs in the *Järva* area of Stockholm, and he also wanted to show that what happens in the Swedish suburbs affects society as a whole. When important social functions such as the employment service, ATMs, and police offices are dismantled, social security also disappears. It also means that the conflict affects more people than those who work and live in the suburbs.

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In recent decades, Sweden has become a multicultural country. Migration and globalization have made it so that around 24 percent of primary school students were eligible for first-language teaching in 2014–2015 (Bunar, 2015). This increases the need to develop methods to create bridges between the school and the students. The teacher must take an interest in and listen to the terminology of the street and be prepared to approach a different reality than the one they are used to (Johansson, 2012).

Johansson (2012) referred to Giroux (1994) thoughts on how multiculturalism affects schools. He argued that, in the future, schools will face difficult questions about multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and labor. These issues will play an important role in determining how education will be conducted in the future (Johansson, 2012).

Hip hop and gangster rap are strongly associated with today's society. Sernhede and Söderman (2010) study confirms this. Their research shows there are strengths in rap music in the sense that by letting young people's music in, an interaction between teachers and students arises that makes it easier to build bridges between the teacher and student. This claim is also supported by Christopher Emdin (2013) who explained that an alternative learning approach can benefit students.

Musical expressions tend to emerge in youth movements to describe their reality. One example of this is punk music, where young people did everything almost 40 years ago; for example, they could provoke the adult world by singing critical lyrics about society and wearing provocative clothes. The aforementioned jazz genre and its arrival in Swedish folk parks, which shook up the establishment and where the music and its players were perceived as controversial and offensive to the young people of the time, are another example. In other words, music has consistently provoked and probably always will.

Some forms of aesthetic expression seem to raise particular concerns. Song lyrics by Yasin, for example, contain markedly provocative lyrics, but debates on the appropriateness of other youth-orientated phenomena, such as EPA culture, remain comparatively rare.

A major difference between music genres that previously provoked listeners, such as punk music, and gangster rap, is that they were not previously associated with violence. Despite song titles by the Swedish punk band Ebba Grön such as *Skjut en snut* (Shoot a cop) or *Beväpna er* (Arm yourselves), punk in Sweden was not associated with deadly violence. Despite all the glorification of violence and drugs, there are lyrics that try to describe marginalization in a poetic way, but these songs do not really become visible in the debate.

Gangster rap is an ongoing topic of debate. In his forthcoming book *Nation of Poets* (Yussuf, 2025) journalist Mohamed Yussuf investigated how the Somali oral storytelling tradition has influenced Swedish hip hop, especially through the artist Yasin and his lyrics. Yussuf described how this tradition, with roots in the Horn of Africa, has been channeled through Yasin and his friends, helping to shape a unique Swedish gangster rap culture. In 2025, Yasin was forced to cancel concerts due to security, as threats have been directed at both the artist and the event (SVT News, 2025).

Yussuf (2025) emphasized that this artform is not only a musical expression but also a cultural bridge between generations and societies. By integrating the Somali oral tradition into Swedish hip hop, Yasin and his circle have created a platform where young people from suburban areas can share their stories and experiences. This has contributed to redefining Swedish culture and giving voice to groups that were previously invisible in the public conversation. TikTok and Snapchat will most likely be around for a long time, as will gangster rap. Perhaps there are alternatives, other than a ban, to prevent children and young people from listening to gangster rap. There is a benefit in writing about other topics than crime because some are relevant and equally important, and more people want to listen to rap that is not just about crime as it can serve as an educational tool for students.

3. THEORY

This study employs two theoretical frameworks: *critical pedagogy* and the concept of *habitus*.

3.1. Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is pertinent to this study as it addresses issues of exclusion and the discourses surrounding *the Other*, highlighting how many children and young people experience marginalization. The Brazilian philosopher and educator Freire (1975) argued that individuals who experience poverty and exclusion must develop critical awareness of their conditions to transform their realities. Freire asserted, *"If people are incapable of critically perceiving the themes of their time and thus actively intervening in reality, they are dragged along in the wake of change. They see that times are changing, but they are immersed in this change and therefore cannot recognise its dramatic significance"* (Freire, 1975).

In contemporary Sweden, societal shifts mirror global trends, where increasing forces pull social groups further apart (Arvidson, 2023). The reception of rap music, for instance, varies according to socioeconomic context. Sernhede and Söderman (2010) observed the retreat of the welfare state from economic and social commitments, which contributes to growing insecurity and the increased policing of vulnerable areas, a phenomenon also noted in countries such as France and England. Censorship or dismissal of rap music as a genre would overlook its potential as a cultural expression to address themes such as exclusion, segregation, and integration (Arvidson, 2023).

Education is a critical vehicle for shaping the future envisioned by society. Giroux (1994) emphasized the role of concepts such as multiculturalism, knowledge, and labor in educational purposes amid globalization. Critical pedagogy calls for an educational approach that listens to diverse cultural realities beyond a Western-centric perspective (Johansson, 2012). Uhnoo and Sernhede (2022) discussed how weakening Swedish welfare exacerbates segregation in urban areas, affecting young people's socioeconomic status, health, education, and future prospects. History demonstrates that feelings of marginalization often precipitate counter-movements, a form of protest that youth have historically enacted through music genres such as jazz, rock, and now hip hop, all rooted in marginalized communities (Johansson, 2012).

Rap music, as Sernhede (1995) noted, functions as a critical commentary on society, offering young people a means to create counter-identities, sometimes with an element of provocation. Growing up in stigmatized neighborhoods, many youths perceive themselves as less valuable due to high unemployment and welfare dependency, which contributes to gang mobilization (Uhnoo & Sernhede, 2022). Sernhede and Söderman (2010) described this as a form of *neighborhood nationalism*, where suburban areas become protected zones resisting stigmatization from mainstream society. Music becomes a powerful tool for marginalized youth to voice their experiences and frustrations. Sernhede (1995) highlighted hip hop's educational potential, comparing its role in contemporary Swedish popular education to the historic role of popular education aimed at the working class 150 years ago.

3.2. Habitus

The relationship between individuals and society is central to Bourdieu (1996) sociology. The concept of habitus describes the internalized dispositions shaped by social position, influencing behaviors, perceptions, and expressions, such as dress, linguistic style, and cultural tastes. Johan Söderman (2011) explained Bourdieu's field theory as a social space with its own rules (doxa), within which an individual's habitus, one's embodied cultural personality, operates.

Bourdieu (1996) conceptualized habitus as structured structures, which means that individuals experience the social world differently based on their embodied dispositions. The same behavior or opinion may hold opposite values depending on the observer's habitus (p. 96). This framework helps explain social divides in vulnerable areas, where perceptions of right and wrong vary significantly. As Bourdieu (1994) stated, the division of society into classes is reproduced in embodied form through habitus. The terms cultural capital and habitus explains the mechanisms that give rise to different lifestyles and forms of culture (Nilsson, 2003).

Music preference exemplifies habitus, as it is deeply tied to identity and social class (Bourdieu, 1992). Johan Söderman (2011) emphasized that habitus constitutes cultural educational capital, enabling individuals to navigate their social fields. In marginalized suburbs, shared tastes in music and style create social capital and a sense of belonging, which may confer symbolic capital when accepted within a group (Johan Söderman, 2011).

4. METHODOLOGY

To answer the aim and research questions, a qualitative research approach was used. Phenomenology is used as an approach to capture the views of the individual and bring them to light. This approach is relevant to the study because it seeks to capture the informants' perspectives on social phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In other words, phenomenological ideas about how individuals perceive and interpret the world will constitute a methodological frame of reference, and answers will emerge from the data created through the interviews. Bryman (2008) described phenomenology as a philosophical approach that deals with how individuals create and interpret their world. These interpretations should also be placed in context—that is, in a social science frame of reference (Bryman, 2008).

4.1. Data Collection

Six educators were contacted by email. The term educator refers to people who work on educational activities with young people in the municipal sector, either within primary schools or educational associations. Five of the informants were found through contacts and one through a lecture attended by the author. With rap music, there is no distinction in this study between rap and gangster rap music. Here, clarification is necessary as the distinction between the genres is not always obvious; rap is one of the four pillars on which hip hop rests. Gangster rap is a branch of rap that emerged mainly in Los Angeles in the late 1980s, partly as a backlash against rap music from New York, which was considered mediocre, but gangster rap was also born out of social injustice and a hatred of the way the police treated people in the so-called ghettos. In Sweden, modern gangster rap emerged in the mid-2000s with the controversial group Kartellen (Johan Söderman, 2011).

All six informants work in education. One is employed in the field of culture, three in municipal schools, one in an independent school, and the sixth in the popular education movement. The informants are referred to as educators even though not all of them have a formal pedagogical education. Because they work pedagogically with music and dance in various forms and the concept of educator is not a so-called protected title, they have been given the title of educator. Two of the informants are involved in the social debate through their newspaper columns and active advocacy of rap music as a working method. The informants work with children and young people aged 8–18.

The data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with predetermined areas. An interview guide was employed. The interviews consisted of open-ended interview questions with a number of supplementary questions to the informants in order to capture their perspectives. The open-ended nature of the questions encourages the informants to elaborate on their answers within the various subareas. Four of the interviews took

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place at the informants' workplaces. Two took place via Teams and were recorded via mobile phone where the author of the study led the conversation on gangster rap and pedagogical learning according to the interview guide.

Each interview lasted until saturation and all areas had been covered. All interviews were recorded on a mobile phone and then transcribed in verbatim. The transcription considered the informants' possible hesitation, slang expressions, and silence by showing in the result how the conversation proceeded. To include slang expressions and concepts that can be linked to the subject, spoken language is included in the findings. The interviews were transcribed in separate Word documents.

4.2. Data Analysis

An inductive approach was used to analyze and process the data. When this approach is used, conclusions are drawn based on the interpretation and experiences that emerge from the answers given by the informants. The analysis will probably move between inductive and deductive interpretation of data, as there is always a preconception that may affect the result. This means that it will be difficult to take a completely objective approach to the data as subjective opinions will relate to the interpretations. However, the main approach is as inductive as possible. This means that the study draws generalizable conclusions from the interviews and the conclusions drawn from them (Bryman, 2008). This is reinforced by Bryman (2008) who wrote, "*In qualitative interviews, it is desirable to allow the interview to move in different directions, as this provides knowledge about what the interviewee perceives as relevant and important*" (Bryman, 2008). In other words, it is important that the informants are given space to discuss the questions.

The first part of the analysis process consisted of reading the material unbiasedly several times for familiarization with the content. Some comments were added if there were nuances that did not emerge. After this initial reading, the material was read further and then fragments of the data were marked, where the informant expressed their view of the phenomenon. These ideas were placed in codes based on which theme they belong to. The themes formed the base for the contribution to describing the informant's view of a phenomenon. After this step, the codes were sorted and organized so that together they form a whole, a theme.

Then the material was read through again with the themes as the focus. When the theme and subthemes were read upwards and downwards with the codes again, three hierarchical levels were created where the lowest level was labeled as codes, the middle level as subthemes, and the top level as a theme. In this reading, the various levels were named and thus given meaning in relation to the purpose of the study. The themes that emerged through inductive interpretation form the basis of the study and answer the questions. In the Findings section, the theme and subthemes are presented and exemplified through the use of quotations. The informants have been given fictive names: *Kim, Mascha, Lee, Bonnie, Tintin,* and *Niko.*

4.3. Ethical Aspects

The study has complied with the Swedish Research Council (2017) requirements on confidentiality, professional secrecy, anonymity, and confidentiality. The informants' name or the city in which they work will not be mentioned. A missive letter containing a brief description of the author and the author's study, with a mention of the duty of confidentiality, has either been read out over the telephone or handed out as a document at the interview. The participants will be referred to as informants for short. The cities where they worked will be referred to as X. Consent was given verbally. Informants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without any follow-up questions about why they did not want to complete the interviews. It is important that the opinions of the informants are anonymized as they may not be in line with the

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curriculum, for example, or that personal views on the genre of gangster rap are expressed, as they may be perceived as controversial.

5.FINDINGS

Based on the findings of the interviews, two main themes emerged with two subthemes in each. The first theme was *Rap music as a teaching method* with the subthemes *Pedagogy* and *Socialization.* The second theme was *Rap music and marginalization* with the subthemes *Alienation* and *Cultural appropriation.*

5.1. Rap Music as a Teaching Method
5.1.1. Pedagogy

Something that is characteristic of all six informants is that they see a strength in rap music when it comes to including pedagogical work. They describe rap poetry as a language-development tool. With its dramaturgy and rhyme structure, it is a useful pedagogical tool. Despite the controversial expression that the genre often exhibits, "*Rap is a fantastic addition to other people's worlds; the amount of information sometimes borders on prose*" (Mascha). The informants mainly talk about the subgenre gangster rap as the most controversial. Kim teaches hip hop dance in Sweden and in New York. Kim also visits schools, mainly in exclusion areas, to talk about rap lyrics and analyze them with the students. There is a potential in writing rap lyrics in the sense that it can help young people who have difficulty with the Swedish language to write lyrics in Swedish. Kim provided the following example: "*You have to be creative, how you put it together and all the words—words that you've never heard before.*" Rap lyrics are therefore used in poetry analysis, vocabulary training, and creative writing, especially in motivating for students with Swedish as a second language. Tintin explained that the genre encourages and attracts young students to write. The rhythms in rap music can help students of non-Swedish origin understand how a language is structured rhythmically.

"*Rap music is a great tool because it has rhymes, it has syllables, it has images. ... This theme ... the motif*" (Masha). Informants highlighted rap poetry as an important tool for creating an interest in language and that this unique form of poetry can increase literacy.

5.1.2. Socialisation

All informants believe that rap music contains a social aspect that is worth bringing up in educational contexts. "*Why has the music genre been created? What is the background? Not everyone owns a Volvo, a house, two cars and parents working*" (Kim). Rap music is perceived as a mirror of society that facilitates discussions about class, race, and power.

According to the informants, it is important to have such a discussion (i.e., that the world looks different for different people). Children and young people have access to social media such as TikTok and Snapchat and are aware of the world in a different way as compared to 20 years ago. Therefore, it is important to have a social discussion in the classroom. At the same time, it is important to be careful not to be counterproductive, as the interpretation and analysis of the texts can backfire on the student in a negative way.

Music is a product of its time, just like all art. Society can therefore be interpreted with music that is relevant to its time. All informants feel that rap music is an artform and that aesthetic expression is popular among the young people educators meet in their activities. One informant described the study association's rap activities as "*modern popular education, where the participants formulate their own learning goals*" (Lee).

5.2. Rap Music and Marginalization

5.2.1. Alienation

All the informants expressed that rap is present in many of the students who they meet in their respective activities. The young people who live in particularly vulnerable areas listen to rap music to a greater extent, according to Bonnie, but at the same time feel that the genre is widespread. The dominance of rap is explained by its role as a rebellious expression of youth: "*a little bit of rock 'n roll when it broke through*" (Kim). Rap music is most popular in socioeconomically depressed areas but "*crosses class boundaries*" (Bonnie). For example, this informant gives an example of how socially vulnerable some students are: "*It's poor linguistically ... It's poor in most things ... Well, they don't have the same credentials that another child has. A child who has grown up in safety*" (Bonnie).

The informants expressed slightly different opinions when it comes to addressing the topic of exclusion in a pedagogical context. For example, Mika believed it is important to dare to address charged topics so as to be able to have a discussion about how people feel. Another informant expressed that caution is required as it can have a negative impact on young people. Although the informants do not consider rap music to be a pedagogical tool on a conscious level, they agree it is a genre that interests many young people.

During the interviews, it became clear there is an *us versus them* perspective based on the informants' stories about the children and young people they work with.

Interesting answers emerged from the informants about how they interpret young people's view of themselves. These are answers that can be linked to both habitus and critical pedagogy, in that the interviewers touch on how big a role an individual's background plays in how they view themselves and their place in society. During the interviews, it emerged that many young people feel excluded and have difficulty finding a place in life; thus, listening to and writing and performing rap become a way to make themselves heard. Thoughts came up about who is "*the bearer of culture and who gets access to a culture that someone has helped to create*" (Kim). Thoughts also came up about what references children have depending on what their life situation looks like and what social context they live in.

In summary, it can be said that none of the informants consciously work with the so-called hip hop pedagogy but feel that rap music means a lot and interests many children and young people, whether it is in the municipal school or other more informal and creative arenas.

According to the informants, they are not afraid to bring up the sensitive topics that rap lyrics often contain in their respective educational activities. However, two of the informants were cautious about talking about these issues among the younger students in elementary school: "*If you know what you are doing and have an educational agenda and a safe environment to work in, it is possible to have quite a high ceiling*" (Kim).

During the interviews, another aspect emerged when it turned out that Kim works with hip hop dance, which means that hip hop is generally perceived as "*cool*" and makes it easier to get children and young people to move. Dancing and the joy of movement strengthen self-confidence.

5.2.2. Cultural Appropriation

It is clear how many students imitate their idols' designer clothes. Expensive clothes worn by children and young people at socioeconomically vulnerable schools can signal status but also raise suspicions of illegal income, according to Bonnie. Two of the informants problematized non-African American actors' use of rap music. Forcing rap as a pedagogical approach in a learning environment that is not authentic risks the opposite effect. It is also clear that the genre is masculine coded; that is, according to Lee, guys dominate Swedish gangster rap. The informant, who works in the studio with young rappers, tries to steer them toward broader themes than gangster

lyricism in order to increase their chances of getting the music published on streaming platforms. There is a greater opportunity to reach out if the music is not only available to those who live in the "*hoods*" (Lee).

In summary, rap music has a unique ability to bring together language and subject knowledge in a way that few other genres can. With its rhymes, rhythms, and storytelling, it becomes a powerful tool in teaching Swedish and social studies, as well as working with values that are important to everyone. When students recognize themselves in the lyrics, their engagement and motivation are sparked in a way that is often missing in traditional textbooks. However, according to the informants, it is also important for teachers to be aware that many rap lyrics contain problematic themes and messages; therefore, there is a need to help students understand and discuss the content in a reflective manner.

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to investigate how rap music can be used as a pedagogical tool in the Swedish educational system. The following research questions were posed: 1) How can rap music be used in an educational context to describe exclusion; and 2) How can the use of rap music help students in school lessons?

The findings of the study show that the informants see various strengths and areas of application in using rap music for educational purposes. All say they feel that rap music is a popular music genre among young people and that it is difficult to ignore the fact that it will be popular for a long time to come. All informants discuss the music's links to crime but do not see that a ban would help. It is possible to link the views of several of the informants to critical pedagogy and the concept of *the Other*.

The previous research on so-called hip hop pedagogy is relatively dated. The rap music most young people listen to, especially young boys, is gangster rap. It becomes clear that it is not really the rap genre itself that is the problem, as all the informants indicated, but it is the lyrics and the connection to criminal gangs that complicate its use in educational activities. It is clear that all the teachers interviewed have a good insight into what young people listen to and believe that it does not matter if schools and society ban gangster rap. Young people and children come into contact with it regardless of whether it is via TikTok or Snapchat. Research from the US has shown there were streams of literature that saw a strength in meeting young people in their music in order to motivate and instruct depending on what is to be taught (Anderson, 1993).

One of the informants was clearly skeptical about exposing children and young people to rap. The reasons given were that young people with various traumas do not have the ability to understand the music and what it is associated with. Children and young people do not have the tools to understand and sort it out. Allowing school staff to play gangster rap may instead fuel the anxiety and violent capital they already carry. Their habitus clashes with the structure of (Bonnie's) school and their desire to follow the curriculum and be a good role model for the students. As Sachs and Schönfeldt-Aultman (2018) study shows, talking about controversial topics in the classroom requires caution.

Here, there is a difference between the other informants who did not believe that a ban would help but rather that it could have the opposite effect. Some of the informants believed that rap lyrics can help children in the classroom and used it relatively frequently in the classroom as a teaching tool in both Swedish and social studies. However, all informants emphasized they see a strength in using rap in Swedish. It becomes clear that they see aspects of rap music in terms of using rhyme and sentence structure that can be used in a positive way (Sernhede & Söderman, 2010) who find that analyzing lyrics stimulates creative writing and increases vocabulary. Meacham et al. (2019) also showed that students are rewarded with cultural and linguistic flexibility by using rap texts.

In terms of the explicit and controversial nature of using rap lyrics, all informants argued that teachers or educators should exercise caution when using them with children and young people and that this is consistent with the theory of creating a safe *space* in the learning context (Gayle et al., 2013).

None of the informants in this study saw any benefits in banning gangster rap. Gangster rap is freely available on Snapchat and TikTok, and all informants recognized this. Banning it would only make the genre more attractive. As one of the informants noted, it is not a good idea to ban aesthetic forms of expression but that it is better to bring controversial issues to light in order to learn to understand a phenomenon. In this respect, parallels can be drawn with Freire (1975) critical pedagogy, which expresses the importance of following in the wake of change.

In this study, it became clear that there is an *us versus them* perspective based on the informants' stories about the children and young people they work with.

Some of the informants explained that African American music has always faced resistance in gaining respect from Western popular culture. Parallels were drawn with the arrival of jazz and rock music in Europe, when many perceived the African American culture as provocative. This is supported by Kjellberg (1985) history of jazz in Sweden. It is also supported by Anderson (1993) who argued that rap music also stands for self-determination and African American pride and is an important voice for those living in marginalization.

Interesting answers emerged from the informants about how they interpret young people's views of themselves. Answers that can be linked to both habitus and critical pedagogy in that the interviewers touched on the extent to which an individual's background affects how they view themselves and their place in society. During the interviews, it emerged that many young people feel excluded and find it difficult to find a place in life. In addition, listening to and writing and performing rap are a way of making themselves heard. Thoughts also emerged about the references children have depending on their life situation and the social context in which they live.

To summarize, it can be said that none of the informants consciously work with so-called hip hop pedagogy but that all of them had strong opinions that rap music means a lot to many children and young people, whether working in the municipal school or other more informal and creative arenas. The study shows that in their respective educational settings, the informants are not afraid to address the sensitive topics that rap lyrics often contain. However, a few of the informants were cautious about talking about it among the younger students in primary school, even though it was seen to be possible with an educational agenda and a safe environment to work in. This is also in line with the ideas that working with hip hop dance, which is one of the aforementioned pillars of hip hop, may make it easier to get children and young people to move, thus using dance and the joy of movement to strengthen their self-confidence. It is clear that the informants are aware of the interest in rap music among many young people. It can also be seen that they include rap in different contexts and in various ways in their teaching.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to explore whether a critical pedagogical approach could shed light on and make rap music or gangster rap more receptive as an educational tool. It was hoped to also provide an insight into a subculture that will continue to grow and to highlight the socially critical contribution that the genre often makes. It is important to explore and expose the genre and find the strengths and weaknesses of rap music as a tool in an educational context in order to support students' learning.

Rap gives a voice to young people who are often unheard in society (i.e., those who are socially and economically marginalized). It becomes their way of expressing their reality and experiences. At the same time,

there is a risk that the same lyrics, if used uncritically, can reinforce existing negative stereotypes. Therefore, it is important to create a space for conversations about cultural respect, about what it means to be a guest in a culture, about avoiding cultural appropriation, and about how identity is shaped and expressed through music.

At the same time, the digital world, with social media and streaming platforms, opens new opportunities for young artists to reach audiences and build careers. However, provocative and sensational content are often rewarded, which places high demands on us as educators to help students develop a critical approach, not only to the music but to the entire media landscape. All of this shows that rap music can be much more than just music; it is an educational tool and a starting point for deeper discussions about complex social issues. However, for this to work, teachers must be able to frame the content, be culturally sensitive, and truly meet students where they are, with respect and reflection.

7.1. Future Research

As in all studies, there are limitations. This study is a small one as the number of informants is few. Nevertheless, the informants in this study provide a picture of rap as a tool for education.

Arvidson (2023) playlist on Spotify called *Swedish gangster rap* presents several songs where the lyrics are about grief over friends who have passed away, the stress of living a criminal life, and love for a girlfriend. References to crime and dark topics are present. It would therefore be interesting to further investigate how some of the young rappers themselves view the genre they have helped to create, including the rappers who started the Swedish gangster rap wave and those who now put out songs on social media and Spotify. It would also be interesting to talk to head teachers about their views on introducing some form of hip hop pedagogy in Swedish schools.

There is a benefit in writing about other topics than crime because there are other topics that can be relevant and equally important, and more people want to listen to rap that is not just about crime.cultural bridge between generations and societies. By integrating the Somali oral tradition into Swedish hip-hop, Yasin and his circle have created a platform where young people from suburban areas can share their stories and experiences. This has contributed to redefining Swedish culture and giving voice to groups that were previously invisible in the public conversation.

The study shows that the interviewed teachers use the genre of rap and, to some extent, gangster rap in their educational activities. In this study, the teachers saw that there is a benefit in using rap for the purpose of letting the students create music, as the ability to sing or play an instrument is not required. The informants also use rap lyrics when talking about crime and exclusion. This process would also be of interest for future studies in researching how young people react to all the explicit song lyrics they are fed via social media and the explicit issues the adult world wants to ban. Further, it would also be interesting to talk to school leaders about their views on introducing some form of hip hop pedagogy in Swedish schools through interviews.

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