



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged



Hip-Hop echoes in south Madrid teenagers' soundscapes

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 January 2016
Received in revised form 14 June 2016
Accepted 1 July 2016
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Multimodality
Sensorial ethnography
Music education
Hip-Hop
Secondary education

ABSTRACT

This paper draws on findings from a collaborative ethnographic project with 13–14 year old adolescents in an educationally progressive secondary school in Madrid. The project developed as an educational innovation experience during music lessons and allowed students to collaboratively produce multimodal soundscapes on the role of music in their daily lives. This analysis focuses on the place of Hip-Hop in these adolescents' musical and expressive cultures, especially as traces of Hip-Hop esthetics are incorporated into the projects created during the project. Our analysis suggests that traces of Hip-Hop culture (as a broad global manifestation involving various expressive practices such as rap, dance or graffiti) emerge in a variety of ways in students' productions.

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In this paper, we present some findings from a larger participatory action-research and educational innovation project focused on the place of music in the daily lives of adolescents in Madrid. This analysis, in particular, focuses on the place of Hip-Hop in these adolescents' musical and expressive cultures, especially as traces of Hip-Hop esthetics are incorporated into the projects created during the educational experience. The study builds on two strands of ideas that also provide the framework for the analysis of the place of Hip-Hop music and culture in the cohort of Madrid secondary school students who have collaborated in our study.

First, music is approached as a social and expressive practice building from a notion of music socialization (Morgade, 2013) that is in many ways parallel to the language socialization (Duff, 2008; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012) and literary socialization paradigms (Poveda, 2003). We understand music as a social and cultural practice that is central to contemporary life and plays a dual role in, primarily peer-led, adolescent socialization processes. Adolescents are socialized *through* music: they build their social identities and worldviews partly through engagement with music and connected expressive and media practices (Morgade, 2014). They are also socialized *to* music: to understand, create and consume music and musical media in particular ways. Additionally, given how music is produced and circulates in the daily lives of teenagers, music – as a semiotic artifact – condenses and makes visible the multiple places and scales (Lemke, 2000; Peirce, 1902; Silverstein, 2003) of musical

experience (from the most private and intimate to global collective events) and the array of communicative means and modes through which music and musical practices, multimodal practices, are shared among contemporary adolescents (e.g. Delgado, 2015; Woodside & Jiménez, 2012).

Second, the study is inserted within a Music education innovation project that seeks to foster students' critical reflection around and attention to sound, auditory and music experience (Morgade, 2014). To do so, we build on the construction of experience, as sensory experience, developed by authors such Ingold (2011) or Pink (2011a), and particularly, on the methodological realization of the latter through sensorial approach to ethnography (Pink, 2011b) – which we believe can be adapted and used in participatory projects with secondary school students (Mitchell & de Lange, 2012). Through various strategies – described below – students were guided to document and re-experience sound, music and musicality in their daily lives. The final product of this process was the composition by student workgroups of a *soundscape*: a multimodal digital *landscape* using sound music, image, video, and words that captured aspects of their musical experiences, identities and lived auditory/embodied daily experiences (Comelles, 2012; Morgade & Müller, 2015; Schafer, 1993).

The soundscapes produced and compiled in this research project are heterogeneous, showing the multiple experiences, projected identities and places of music of a sample of Madrid teenagers; as well as the level of engagement with the school project they were inserted in. With this paper we examine the places, shapes and possible meanings, a semiotic analysis, of Hip-Hop culture (Montoya, 2002) in the multimodal/multisensorial *soundscapes* produced by

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these students. Our analysis suggests that Hip-Hop culture, as a broad global manifestation involving various expressive practices such as rap, dance or graffiti (Petchauer, 2009), has, in many ways, become something akin to a 'hegemonic' discourse (Rampton, 2003) in adolescents' musical lives and experiences. 'Hegemonic' probably not in the sense that it articulates power relations or structural forms of musical or social subordination in youth, but in the sense that it penetrates, saturates and is naturalized in the musical practices and experiences of contemporary adolescents. Consequently, traces – or echoes – of Hip-Hop esthetics (Petchauer, 2009; Mahiri, 2006) are visible and manifest themselves in various aspects of the musical-visual-aural artifacts produced by students, even when these students are not claiming any explicit orientation or affiliation to a Hip-Hop youth identity (Alim, 2011) or expressive style (Eckert, 2000; Hodkinson, 2002; MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002; Poveda, 2012).

Our argument is structured in two parts. After presenting the logic and procedures of the action-research/educational innovation project, we briefly sketch a history of Hip-Hop culture in Madrid and, particularly, of the local realizations and highlights that are close and accessible to the students who participated in this study and that are part of the socialization experiences of youth in the community. Later, we analyze students' soundscapes arguing that it is possible to de-compose Hip-Hop music into various elements, which emerge, are de-constructed and re-assembled (Jewitt, 2013) in a variety of ways in adolescents' productions. In other words, we attempt to identify how traces of Hip-Hop musicality are incorporated into their audio-visual productions as one of the elements that are part of their life experiences in their cultural context, inside, outside and in between school, family and peers.

1. Methodology: innovating in secondary school music education through collaborative participatory research

1.1. Setting and participants

This paper draws from a research and educational innovation project conducted during the 2013–14 school year in Music education for Year 2 Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) students (13–14 year old students in their 8th year of compulsory education) in a south Madrid school. *La Colonia* (pseudonym) is a relatively large school, divided in two sections – with distinct buildings and administrative units – holding preschool (children between 3 and 5 years of age) plus primary education (1st to 6th grade) and secondary education (from 7th to 12th grade, divided in the Spanish system into Compulsory Secondary Education and pre-university Baccalaureate). The school is located in a socioeconomically and ethnically heterogeneous neighborhood of the Latina district of the city of Madrid (located in the southern part of the city), that gathers middle and working-class Spanish-origin families and migrant families – primarily from Latin America – that have settled in the neighborhood over the last two decades (Cervera, 1990). *La Colonia* is a *subsidized* school ('centro concertado'), a private institution supported through public funds, run by a well-known social and educational progressive foundation that has several educational centers and programs in the Madrid region. Places at the school are in high demand – although entry procedures and regulations are the same as for public state-run schools – and enrollment in this school involves substantial commitment on the part of families with the educational project and philosophy of the school (including financial support from families for additional programs in the school). Yet, given the institution's educational mission, the school does have a student body that somewhat reflects the social and educational diversity of the community in which it is located (according to school data, 10% of students have an immigrant background and

also the school has a program for students with developmental needs).

1.2. Procedure

During the second semester of the academic year all three sections of Year 2 of ESO students (about 90 students) participated in a collaborative project involving researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), the Music education teacher of the school and several professional musicians and visual artists who gave master classes to the students in the school.

The central goal of the research/innovation project was to collectively explore the meaning and place of music in adolescents' lives and do so through different procedures and media. The project was framed as a participatory sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015). We draw from this perspective as our project is strongly aligned with two central features of sensory ethnography well laid out by Pink (2011b) in her critical comparison between multimodal approaches and sensory ethnography. First, a sensorial (phenomenological) perspective understands the senses as operating as an integrated system through which human beings construct their experience. Thus, while in our project we are apparently interested in a domain of experience (music) that involves particular modes and media, our methodological premise is that music for adolescents is a multisensorial, multimodal and embodied experience involving issues such as how, where, when music is consumed or produced and what affective and social experiences it mobilizes. Second, sensory ethnography is deeply entangled with a collaborative research approach in which ethnographers learn from and explore experience with participants and co-researchers, including creating a setting through which adolescents could explore with each other and learn from each other in relation to the place and meaning of music in their daily lives.

With these starting premises, during the semester students worked collaboratively in groups, made up of 5–6 students, and completed several tasks guided by their teacher and the collaborating researchers, they: (a) collected images and sounds from their daily lives, digitally archiving and editing these materials to complete a multimodal soundscape/narrative¹ based on their materials; (b) maintained work-diaries of this process; (c) interviewed each other on their experiences and interactions with music; (d) prepared public presentations of this experience, organized as an itinerant exhibit involving roundtables led by students and multimedia installations for the whole school and the School of Psychology of the participating university. Also, the researchers and the teacher (and the students) documented all these activities through audio and video-recordings, photographs and field diaries. Additionally, the research team interviewed (and held informal conversations) with the teacher–researcher, the students in the project and other teachers in the school and the visiting artists (none of these invited artists considered themselves Hip-Hop artists). As mentioned above, each workgroup archived and uploaded their materials through individual and class Tumblr blogs created for the study and compiled in a general blog of the project known as the 'Museum of Musical Experiences'.²

¹ The project/artifact the students were expected to produce was explicitly termed a 'narrative' or 'sound-scape' by the instructors-researchers and students. This was done as the term 'narrative' would be initially more familiar to the students and also allowed to explore/expand the conventional (i.e. more textually-based) meaning of the term. Nevertheless, this choice also involved a series of complexities that are outside the scope of this paper and that we cannot discuss here.

² All these materials are posted in public blogs (Tumblr and Blogspot) but to protect the anonymity of the school and students we will not disclose the links and sources.

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