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# Who are the children we teach? Considering identities, place and time-space in education

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**ABSTRACT**
This article critically considers the importance of educators asking, 'who are the children we teach?' before attending to questions of purpose, curriculum and pedagogy. Through examining the relationships between identities, place and time-space, the article contributes to wider debates about how geography can enhance our knowledge of educational institutions, systems, processes, experiences and landscapes. Written in the context of a 'knowledge turn' in England – in which supporting young people to engage with disciplinary and subject knowledge has been positioned by some as the central purpose of schooling – the article argues that the geographies of children and young people have, at times, been under-considered in education. To counter this, drawing on a case study of five young people's narratives about London, the article uses the illustrative example of religion and identity to examine how the young people navigate multiple, sometimes contradictory, social spaces when constructing and representing their identities in London. The article concludes by arguing that for educators to truly empower young people in, and through, their schooling, it is of significant value for them to engage with the geographies of those they teach.

**KEYWORDS**
Children's geographies; geographies of education; geography education; identities; place; time-space

## Introduction

Children's lives and geographies vary significantly within and between places, and across time-space. As Tuan (1990, p. 5) explains there is a common world, but 'no two persons see the same reality, no two social groups make precisely the same evaluation of the environment'. People shape, and are shaped by, the places and time-spaces they exist within (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005), with their (individual and collective) identities constructed through social relations, processes and intersections (Aitken, 2018; Skelton, 2013; Valentine, 2000), which are often connected to place (Hopkins, 2010), temporally situated, and (re)produced through time and space (Lefebvre, 1991, 1992).

The relationships between people, place and time-space matter not only to academics interested in disciplines such as geography – who have long sought to research and represent people's experiences and imaginations of the world – but also to individuals and institutions such as schools. This is because place matters to a person's embodied

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experiences of the world and space matters to the (re)production of societies and places. Put another way, place and time-space matter not only in developing a better understanding of people's lives and geographies, but also to considering people's 'capacity to break out of the confines of their own geographical, anthropological and ecological constraints' (Harvey, 2009, p. 259). In short, they are vital in, and to, people's lives and identities, and also to considering constructive and emancipatory change in an individual's life, and more broadly in societies and places (Harvey, 2009). Schools (and other educational spaces) are often the places where children and young people spend most of their waking hours during the week in term-time; they are places children play, develop relationships and socialise. But more than this, they are the places where, through curriculum and pedagogy, children are supported to think about the world and everyday life in new ways.

Schools 'have profound influences on how young people feel about themselves and their multiple identities, and who young people become as adults' (Hopkins, 2010, p. 183). Educators therefore have ethical and professional responsibilities to think about the education and educational spaces they (co)construct with their students. Drawing on literature and debate in the discipline of geography, and my doctoral research (Hammond, 2020) throughout, in this article I argue that this requires reflecting on children's individual and collective identities and geographies, which includes consideration of the places and time-spaces they shape and are shaped by. The value of educators respecting and valuing children's identities and geographies ultimately lies in ensuring that young people are not constructed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge in classrooms (Freire, 1970).

Although this research was conducted in the field of geography education, the arguments put forward transcend the boundaries of teaching geography and contribute to wider debates in the discipline of education about knowledge and the 'place' of the child in their schooling. In doing so, the article contributes to the growing body of literature which explores the importance of the relationships between geography and education (Brock, 2016; Finn et al., 2021; Puttick, 2022; C. Taylor, 2009; West et al., 2020). As C. Taylor (2009) explains, geography can enhance our understanding of education. For example, in considering the (re) production of inequality in, and through, education; examining differential access to different educational spaces (e.g. universities) due to political, economic and socio-spatial injustices; considering how power relationships are produced and sustained in, and through, social relations and the built environment in institutions such as schools (Barker et al., 2010; Philo & Parr, 2001); and also in questioning the invisibility and/or (mis)representation of some people and places in educational debates, policy, teaching and resources such as textbooks (Dorling & Tomlinson, 2018; Tomlinson, 2019).

The article begins by asking the reader to consider why they might ask the simple, but significant, question 'who are the children we teach?' This question is positioned by the GeoCapabilities project (https://www.geocapabilities.org/) as being the first question a teacher should consider as they engage in what Lambert and Morgan (2010) term 'curriculum making'. Here, curriculum making is understood as a curriculum model which encourages educators to 'balance' student experiences, pedagogical choices and geography as a school subject, as they engage in the creative acts of planning and teaching (Lambert & Morgan, 2010). To introduce and situate this question, I examine literature surrounding the 'knowledge turn' in education in England. The knowledge turn is

described by Chapman (2021, p. 1) as 'a movement in curriculum studies that places disciplines and subjects at the center of thinking about what schools are for'. However, it has been argued that this 'turn' has resulted in children's geographies being under considered in schools and classrooms (Catling & Martin, 2011; Roberts, 2017), and I examine the impacts of this omission.

I then explore the relationships between identities, place and time-space, before moving on to introduce the research which was 'an investigation into children's geographies and their value to geography education in schools'. The research encouraged young people to share their geographies and imaginations of London in a participatory manner, before I considered the value of children's geographies to geography education in schools more broadly. The separation between these two foci is important, as the distinction aimed to limit any imposition of (my own) agendas on to the children's narratives. I then share the findings of the study focusing on young people's narratives analysed as relating to religion and identities in London, as what Massey (2008) conceptualises as a 'world city'. The article concludes by arguing that for educators to be more informed in their curriculum making, and to be able to support children in situating and exploring their own lives and geographies, then they need to truly engage with the question 'who are the children we teach?'

## Why ask 'who are the children we teach?'

Spurred by a concern that schools were increasingly focusing on questions of pedagogy rather than of curriculum and purpose (Young et al., 2014), it can be seen that there has been a 'knowledge turn' since the early 2000s in education in England (Lambert, 2011). However, the place of knowledge in education is much debated (Morgan, 2019), and it is significant to recognise that conceptions of knowledge vary between people and places, and it therefore becomes important to consider not only epistemological dimensions of knowledge, but sociological and political dimensions too (Furlong & Whitty, 2017). Recognising these dimensions is key to considering how knowledge traditions evolve and are contested; how they are expressed in policy; how they are interpreted in institutional arrangements; how they are enacted in teachers' practice (Furlong & Whitty, 2017); and how they are experienced and perceived by those who are taught. Significantly for this paper, the dimensions of knowledge are also critically important to considering different knowledges and their value to education in schools.

As Lambert (2019) sets out, current educational debates relating to knowledge include the perspectives of those who argue for a skills-led education, those who argue for teaching a canon of 'core knowledge' (see Hirsch, 2007), and those who argue for what he terms a 'progressive knowledge-led curriculum' (p. 28). For Lambert, a progressive knowledge-led curriculum is framed around Young's (2008) notion of 'powerful knowledge', or knowledge that has been created and tested in academic disciplines. Lambert argues that by providing children with access to powerful knowledge and exploring with children that knowledge is not fixed, but is contested and open to change, then educational inequalities and 'capabilities deprivation' can be challenged.

Here, the notion of capabilities deprivation refers to what a person would miss if they were unable to access what Lambert (2019) terms a progressive knowledge-led curriculum. For example, 'ability' streaming at either a systemic level or in schools can exclude some (or most)

children from engaging with the more complex knowledge, concepts or methods of a discipline. Similarly, a narrowly defined curriculum can fail to support students to fully engage with disciplinary thought and debate (Lambert, 2019). Both of these examples could be seen to represent situations in which those who have power deliberately or inadvertently restrict access to knowledge through systems, processes, curricula or actions - or, to use Young and Muller's (2019) term, 'knowledge of the powerful'; i.e. only powerful individuals or groups get to access disciplinary knowledge as part of their education.

The capabilities approach is drawn from the work of economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum and highlights 'the means that a single human being needs to have in order to pursue his or her wellbeing' (Uhlenwinker et al., 2016, p. 238), with Nussbaum's capabilities (listed in Figure 1) being 'concepts which have been used as measures for human development and capacity' (https://www.geocapabilities.org). When applied to education, Bustin (2019, p. 3) suggests that the capabilities approach provides a 'means to consider what a curriculum is able to enable a person "to be" or "to think like" as a result of their education'. Bustin argues that the capabiltiies approach provides a framework for considering the value of a subject-based curriculum, how subjects are of value to a 'good life' and what people are 'capable of doing, thinking or achieving and what freedoms this affords them to live life in the way that they choose' (p. 99-100).

However, for Harvey (2009, p. 91), Nussbaum's capabilities are only 'partially egalitarian' as she

> neglects to consider how class, ethnic, gender or other differences become instantiated in socio-spatial structures (such as the ghettos of both rich and poor) that perpetuate differences (some but not all of which are unjust if not downright objectionable) by way of geographical structures of segregation in human socialization.

In the context of education, it can be seen that Harvey's argument echoes debates in the field of geographies of education (Holloway et al., 2010; Katz, 2008; Kraftl et al., 2021; Pini et al., 2017), including those related to the multi-scalar relationships between socio-spatial injustices and education.

1. Life (of a normal length)
2. Bodily health (including adequate nourishment and shelter)
3. Bodily integrity (freedom to move and explore without encountering violence)
4. Liberty of the senses, imagination and thought
5. Emotions (expressive attachments, love and caring)
6. Practical reasons (the acquired ability through education to identify ends and means)
7. Affiliations (adequate social relations, dignity and self-respect)
8. Relations to other species (the world of nature)
9. Free play
10. Control over one's environment (political and material)

**Figure 1.** Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities (as cited in Harvey, 2009, p. 90).

Massey's (2008, p. 24) short, but thought-provoking, question 'whose geography?' is significant here in facilitating discussion as to if, and how, 'the child' sees themselves in the curriculum, and connects to the subject they are studying, their teacher and their education more broadly. Massey's question highlights that we all have geographies – spatialities, experiences, imaginations and knowledge of the world – but that the geographies of some are afforded more attention than those of others. Radical movements in the discipline of geography since the 1960s have led to a greater focus on the geographies of people who have been marginalised, often considering how people might be empowered in, and through, research (Cresswell, 2013; Peet, 2015). As has increasingly been examined in literature in the field of geographies of education (Brock, 2016; C. Taylor, 2009), geographical knowledge, ideas, methods and concepts could enhance our understanding of educational spaces, systems, processes and practices. This is significant in a context in which educational policies and practices have led to the (re)production of injustices in both education and society. This has, at times, resulted in the geographies of some – including children themselves (Catling & Martin, 2011; Hammond & McKendrick, 2020) – being under-considered in schools and classrooms. Thus, engaging with both children's geographies and geographies of education can enhance our understanding of educational institutions, systems and practices, and crucially how they are experienced and perceived by those we teach.

The GeoCapabilities project appeared to recognise these arguments in its March 2016 newsletter, through the development of a model entitled 'Adopting a capabilities approach' (see Figure 2). The model expresses that educators should consider three questions, starting from the outer concentric circle and moving inwards when they engage in curriculum making and enactment:

(1) Who are the children we teach?
(2) Why teach geography in this day and age?
(3) What shall we teach and how shall we teach it?

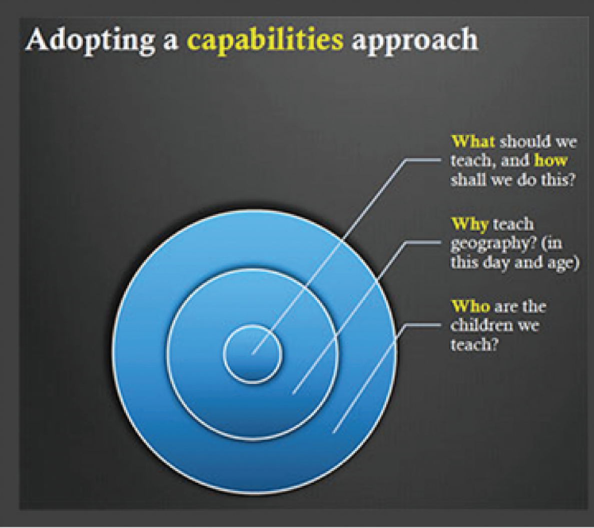


**Figure 2.** Adopting a capabilities approach: as shared in the GeoCapabilities electronic newsletter on 8 March 2016.

Although this model has received limited attention in published work and was shared in the newsletter with no explanatory guidance, I argue that it is worthy of further consideration. This is because the model suggests that teachers should consider the children they teach before anything else. In doing so, the model represents children as children, and not students (their given identity in school), thus appearing to celebrate the child as a social actor who exists beyond the school gate, and who has their own experiences, imaginations and 'everyday' knowledge of the world (Hammond, 2022). Following this, the model expresses that the teacher should critically consider the purposes of (a geographical) education in the place and time-space they exist within and contribute to, before making decisions about curriculum (what to teach) and pedagogy (how to teach it). The ordering of the questions is significant, as without considering both the child, and the purposes of (a geographical) education, the questions of curriculum and pedagogy become under-informed.

Put another way, if a teacher decides to teach 'development' without considering children's prior knowledge and experiences, or why they are teaching development, then deeply problematic representations of development, people and places can emerge. This can perpetuate injustices related to the history of geography as a discipline, including those related to the relationships between geography and colonialism (Cresswell, 2013; Dorling & Tomlinson, 2018; Puttick & Murrey, 2020). It can also result in children potentially feeling that they, their families or their homelands and people are excluded from, and/or misrepresented in, the curriculum. When these arguments are contextualised in the well-documented (re)production of racialised views and other injustices through schooling (Tomlinson, 2019), and the present time-space in which there is increased awareness, and challenging, of the reproduction of injustices related to identities in everyday life, then their significance becomes ever more apparent. It can therefore be seen that for educators and policy makers to proactively respond to Harvey's (2009) concerns about social and spatial inequalities, and to empower children in, and through, their schooling, then it is paramount to attend to the question of 'who are the children we teach?' before considering the purposes of teaching geography (or any other subject), and what to teach and how to teach it. To develop these arguments, I now move on to further examine the concepts of identities, place and time-space.

## Identities, place and time-space

Identities are both a fundamental part of being human and 'a powerful organizing presence' in the social worlds that people construct (Leve, 2011, p. 513). Although recognising that is not possible to give a single definition of identity, drawing on Jenkins (2004), Hopkins (2010) explains that identities are relational – they are (re) produced through social relations as individuals and collectives negotiate, contest and explore their similarities and differences with, and to, one another. Identities are significant in exploring how a person or social group feels in different environments; how they represent themselves to, and interact with, others; and a person's sense of belonging to people and places (Leve, 2011).

Although place is a much-debated concept in geography (Cresswell, 2013; Massey, 2005), it is widely considered as a unique combination of location, landscape and meaning; being constructed through its location on the Earth's surface, its history/ies and sense of place (which may be individual and shared; Cresswell,

2008). Place can be conceptualised as humanised space (Tuan, 1976). For Massey (2005, p. 130) space is a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far' with places being collections of stories that exist within the wider geometries of space and time. Figure 3 represents the reciprocal relationships between people, place and time-space. These relationships are multi-way, as people physically and socially shape, and are shaped by, the place and time-space they exist within. On the diagram, time and space are represented as time-space as they are 'indelibly linked' (P. Taylor, 2009, p. 141).

Harvey (2009) highlights the value of considering these relationships since who an individual is, is perpetually shifting through their positionality in relation to people, place, nature and production systems. Using the example of social distinctions (including race and gender), Harvey explains that macro-processes (e.g. neoliberalism) also influence the production of the spatio-temporality, and ultimately people's experiences of the world. Harvey argues there has often been an under-consideration as to how the production of space relates to people's thought and action, leading to assumptions about both the nature of place and time-space and their influences on people. In the case of (geography) education in schools, this might be the representation of nation states as 'natural', rather than socially constructed territories, for example.

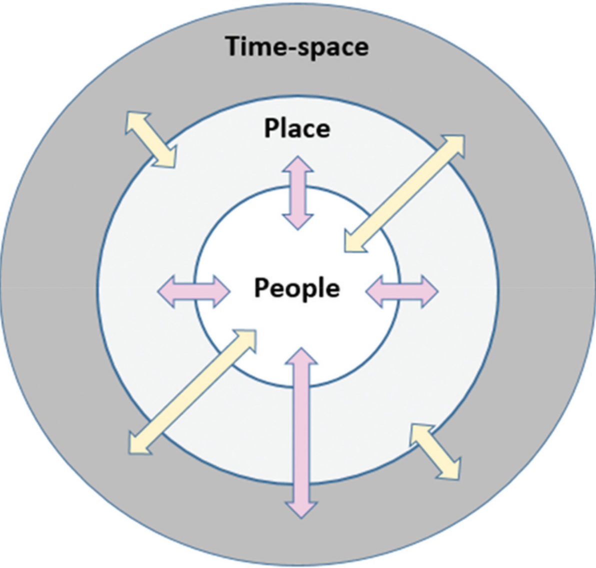


**Figure 3.** The reciprocal relationships between people, place and time-space (Hammond, 2020).

## Introducing the research

The research which I will use to illustrate the arguments presented here was orientated by three research questions (RQs):

RQ1 What do young people's narratives reveal about their geographies and imaginations of London?

RQ2 How can the 'production of space' contribute to knowledge of children's geographies and imaginations of the world?

RQ3 How can geography education use ideas and methodologies from children's geographies to enhance school geography?

Data were collected in London (England) through a 'storytelling and geography group' which met for 90 minutes fortnightly over six sessions between September and November 2014, at the end of the school day. The opportunity to take part in the research was advertised to all year seven and eight students (11–13-year-olds) in a school in which I had previously taught. Five young people chose to 'opt in' to the study, all of whom were thirteen at the time of data collection and all of whom were children I had previously taught and/or tutored. Whilst the data is now several years old (and should be viewed as being of a specific time and place), it serves as an illustrative example of children's geographies.

The research was conducted in line with BERA (2011) ethical guidelines and was approved by IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. To ensure confidentiality yet maintain the agency of the young people who participated in the research by writing in a personal manner, the young people were allocated pseudonyms (Jack, Tilly, Rachel, Alex and Jessica) that were reflective of their 'Western' given names (Hammond, 2021). Since the storytelling and geography group took place after school, it was easily accessible to the young people who participated. Yet, the timing of the research aimed to separate it from the school day. My professional relationships with the school and young people had some advantages; the school was supportive of the research and allowed me to conduct the research on their grounds; and I had some awareness of the young people's backgrounds and they appeared comfortable talking to me, even asking if the sessions could continue after the project ended. However, it was difficult to shake off my previous identity as a teacher during data collection. For example, the young people seemed to expect me to assume a teacher like role if they disagreed with one another.

The storytelling and geography group was constructed using the philosophy that narratives can be 'read' in different ways by different people and discussion can support meaning-making (Yap, 2011). Through the use of oral narratives, the research aimed to enable young people to participate in a way that was familiar to them, concurrent with everyday life and to be active participants in the research, with control over what they shared, when and how (Hammond, 2022). The young people who took part in the research were encouraged to reflect on their geographies and imaginations of London – the city in which they lived, studied and played – this is significant to note as the young people were part of the city, shaping and being shaped by its spaces and places (Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Skelton, 2013; Tuan, 1976).

The research design was informed by Goodson's (2013) work on life histories, specifically triangulating oral data with the spatial-temporal context and other narratives. The significance of these ideas to this study lie in considering how public and private narratives interweave and how people shape, and are shaped by, place and time-space. In the first storytelling and geography group, expectations (such as

confidentiality) were mutually decided upon and agreed with the young people. Drawing on Goodson et al.'s (2010) work on life histories, the session was semi-structured, with the young people being encouraged to create a timeline of key events in their life before sharing them with the group. In the second session, the young people were asked to map their geographies, before sharing them in session three. In the fourth session, newspaper articles, clips and photos related to narratives the young people had shared were discussed, supporting the triangulation of life stories with wider social narratives and events (Goodson, 2013). In the fifth session the young people were asked to reflect upon where their imaginations of the city came from, and in the sixth session they were encouraged to share their experiences of participating in the research, considering what (if anything) they had gained from the experience. All sessions were audio recorded and narratives transcribed. Whilst I share some of the young people's narratives in this article, their maps and timelines are not shared in order to protect their identities.

Once data were collected and narratives transcribed, the data were inductively coded to allow themes to emerge as I 'listened' to the narratives of the young people. Following this, data were coded using Harvey's (1990) 'grid of spatial practices' which draws upon Lefebvre's (1991) work on the 'production of space', with the aim of unravelling some of the subtleties and complexities of spatial practices under late capitalism (Harvey, 1990). The value of coding the young people's narratives in this way lay in enabling further examination of their lives and geographies and the spaces and power relations they negotiate and (re)produce.

## Research findings

The research found that the young people in the study navigated multiple, sometime contradictory, social spaces when constructing and representing themselves and their identities in London; that the young people imagined London as a jigsaw of territories with distinct social rules existing in different spaces and places within the city; and that London was perceived by the young people who participated in the research as a place of opportunity and hope, but also as a place of inequality and injustice (Hammond, 2021, 2022). Analysis showed that with regards to identity, the young people particularly focused on the themes of religion; sex, sexuality and gender; voice; and their experiences of feeling or being British, or not (Hammond, 2021, 2022). The extracts discussed below focus specifically on the young people's narratives analysed as relating to religion and identity. I use religion and identity as an illustrative example to further explore the relationships between people, place and time-space.

Analysis identified several themes in the young people's narratives related to religion and identity. First, the young people discussed 'flows of people' into London, often considering their family heritage and identities. The young people expressed either experiencing, or perceiving that others experienced, a 'friction of distance' (Harvey, 1990) related to their religion, as well as considering the intersectional relationships between the state, communities and religion. Here, 'distance is a barrier to and defense against human interaction' (Harvey, 1990, p. 259), with space having to be 'overcome to accommodate social interaction' (Harvey, 1990). In the case of religion, this might be

differences in the social or spatial practices of religious groups and individuals, meaning there may be a distance for people to overcome when communicating with people who identify as being of a different religion.

Analysis also showed that the young people demonstrated awareness of, and engagement with, geopolitics related to the political domination of space by nation states and/or organisations and how this connects to religion. Furthermore, the young people considered how religion was represented in the media and if/how this leads to people experiencing a friction of distance. The young people also discussed spaces of communication and worship, and considered 'exclusive communities' (Harvey, 1990) and religion, for example, the social reproduction of religion through education and the potential for this to result in inclusion or exclusion. Finally, analysis showed the young people discussed constructed spaces of ritual (e.g. the representation of religion through symbols in the physical and social environment). To further examine these themes, I now draw upon the young people's narratives. As there are relationships between many of the themes, I explore them concurrently.

During the storytelling and geography groups, Jack regularly expressed the significance of religion to him and also linked religion to state by writing 'Allah Akbar' on the Syrian flag. Jack spoke not only of his own experiences of being Muslim, but also his perception of the experiences and representations of other people who identified as Muslim. The major focus of his narratives on this theme was on Arab people and the Arab world. In this way, Jack's narratives can be seen as linking religion to ethnicity, community and state, with '*being Arab*' represented as an ethnoreligious identity. This can also be seen as representative of debates about people's relationships to place changing in today's neoliberal and globalised world, as people are increasingly mobile and connected (Graves & Rechniewski, 2015) and identify with different places.

Analysis showed that Jack's narratives about Arab people often focus on the everyday experiences of Muslims, and they include discussion of racism and geopolitical issues presently occurring in the Arab world. Jack also considers the relationships between his own everyday experiences and geopolitical issues when discussing the representation of Arab people in the media. This narrative is personal to Jack, who is of Arab descent, with both his father and mother being born and raised in the Middle East. Due to geopolitical issues in the region, Jack's father's family have migrated to what Jack terms '*safe countries*' in Europe and North America, while his mother's family remains in the Middle East, which Jack states *'is mostly where all the bombs and stuff happens, but none of my family have died yet'*.

Jack repeatedly expresses concern for his family living in the Middle East, and how the region is represented in the media, education and society more broadly. In the narrative below, Jack articulates some of his concerns:

*Jack: I have two statements yeah, number one is you see when they say Asia yeah, they always think of the . . . they don't think of the Arab side normally, they always think of China and Japan and stuff*

*Tilly: yeah*

*Jack: they never think of Arabs and stuff, and then when you say Middle East yeah, they always think of bombs and stuff*

*Researcher: do you think that everyone does?*

*Tilly: I don't think of bombs, don't worry*

*Jack: I know, I know*

*Tilly: but most people do*

*Researcher: so why do you think the Middle East is seen like this?*

*Tilly: was . . .*

*Jack: because like the governments are idiots, and there's like the terrorists. The thing is yeah . . .*

*Tilly: when people say Middle East they never say about specific places.*

Jack's narrative can be interpreted as him expressing a perception that the Middle East is often hidden from social and political debates, and the attention afforded to other places, a sentiment which is also echoed in Tilly's narratives. Jack's narratives also express his perception that there is a shared cultural imagination of the Middle East as a homogenous region dominated by war and terrorism.

Others in the group, such as Tilly – whose mother is from Spain and father is from Ghana – express messages of support to Jack, and one another, when they share narratives that express a feeling of friction of distance due to their religion. All of the group, apart from Alex who does not mention the region, express that they agree with Jack's perception of the representation of the Middle East. The group are regularly supportive towards each other when they express concern or upset about the representation of religion. An example of this is shown in the narrative below:

*Jessica: To be honest I don't think it's fair for people to get bullied because of their religion, because at the end of the day . . .*

*Jack: you were brought up like that, it's not your fault*

*Jessica: at the end of the day, they was born to follow that religion unless they converted*

*Rachel: like me (laughing), and I still get it*

*Jessica: at the end of the day, I don't think it's fair, because everyone else has their own religion and their own opinion on it, and will find out one day whether it's true or not*

*Rachel: like me, cos I converted.*

Despite the shared sense of injustice towards discrimination against religion, all of the young people in the study share that they have experienced feeling that there is friction of distance towards them and their religion.

Analysis of the data shows that the young people in this research share a perception that social imaginations of religion, which result in bullying and discrimination, are generally acknowledged and accepted as a social norm in London (Hammond, 2021).

For example, when talking about people making fun of Jehovah's Witnesses (her religion), Tilly states '*like it's a known thing*' and '*cos that's what people are like*'. Tilly's religion can be seen as a central aspect of her everyday life, identities and spatial practices. For example, she explains that she worships twice a week and preaches on a Saturday. However, when talking about Jehovah's Witnesses, Jack states that people '*laugh at how they knock at houses*', a statement that Tilly and Rachel agree with. This can be read as representing a social imagination of a friction of distance against a space of ritual, and Jehovah's Witnesses wanting to share, and preach for, their religion.

Jessica also considers the relationships between religion and other aspects of a person's identities. Jessica identifies as '*Christian slash Catholic*', stating that she is unsure which one she is and that she is unclear of the relationships, and/or differences, between the two. In her narratives, Jessica considers Christianity, the English/British national identity and race in the same sentence:

*Jessica: people that are born in England and who are Christians, I think they can marry whoever they want*

*Rachel: no*

*Jessica: obviously, I'm not full English, I'm not white English, so I won't know but, in my opinion they can marry whoever they want. In movies, and documentaries, they don't have to marry a British person.*

In the narrative, Jessica – whose mother is from Ireland, but was born in England and whose father is from Grenada – distances herself from her British citizenship due to her race, expressing a perception that there are relationships between religion, nationality and race, and that these relationships affect what people are able to do. Jessica also expresses in relation to marriage '*you can marry anyone, but you have to convert*', giving the example of her cousin who converted from Christianity to Islam for this purpose. These narratives suggest that Jessica feels there are distinct social rules and imaginations about what a person can do, which depend on their religion, citizenship and race, as well as the law. Rachel contests Jessica's argument but does not expand further on why.

Analysis suggests that Rachel navigates different perceptions of her religion in different spaces. A 'white-British' convert to Islam – whose mother is from England and father is from Scotland – Rachel lives with her parents who have not converted. Rachel's narratives can be read as her navigating the different, sometimes contradictory, social spaces of her religion and her family's beliefs and social practices. For example, when discussing her choice to fast during Ramadan, Rachel notes that she does not celebrate Eid and continues to attend school during the festival, because '*my family are not brought up to be Muslim*'. Rachel expresses that she feels her parents are very accepting of her decision to convert and that they do not eat pork around her out of respect. However, she also notes that she, in turn, supports their celebrations, sharing '*like some things I'll step back on, like New Year's, when they're all drinking, I'll dance and stuff, but I won't drink*'. Rachel explains that because she was brought up with people eating bacon and drinking, both of which are considered to be haram (forbidden) in Islam, she still understands and enjoys that culture. This narrative can be read as Rachel celebrating and supporting her family and heritage.

Rachel conveys that spending time with her aunty and uncle influenced her decision to convert:

*Rachel: my aunty and my uncle, they like converted before me, like 30 years before I was born. I used to go over to their house a lot, I used to go to mosque with them, I used to pray in the middle of the street (laughing), because I used to enjoy that type of culture, that type of religion. So when I did convert, I was successful in a way, but after that I didn't realise that I would still be knocked down for it. Even now, all the time, all the time, like my English side of the family, I haven't met my Scottish side, but some of them are like EDL, so they don't really like . . .*

*Researcher: EDL?*

*Rachel: Yeah, English Defence League, so they don't really like Muslim people in a way. So, erm, when I first said that I was a Muslim, they were like 'what?' they were all confused, cos like it takes a while for them to adapt. And even I get it, you get abuse from Muslim people, which is like the most shocking of all, saying like 'you wear hijab for fashion', 'you're a fake Muslim', saying all this.*

In the narrative above, Rachel expresses that both her extended family and other Muslims have discriminated against her. However, Rachel also shares that she feels that London has offered her a space in which she feels she can convert, noting *'like if I was brought up in Scotland or something, I don't think I would have converted'*. This narrative can be read as being representative of London as a world city (Massey, 2008), in which exposure to different people provides opportunities for an individual to express, and in this case alter, their identities.

Another theme identified during analysis of the young people's narratives about religion and identity, is education and religion. All of the group engage in a discussion about a neighbouring school that Alex states is '*enemies*' with their school. Tilly expresses that she dislikes the neighbouring school because they *'dress like grannies!'* The neighbouring school is a Catholic school, in which Alex – whose father is from England and mother is from Northern Ireland – states '*you have to learn RE, you have no choice, you have to learn RE!'* to which Rachel responds '*ah yeah, they made my cousin buy a bible!*', with Tilly stating '*they force them, they just force them to do that!'* The group discusses students who identify as being Muslim, or another religion, attending this school and express a shared sense that it is morally incorrect for formal education to enforce specific religious beliefs through Religious Education (RE) on to children. These narratives can be read as the young people questioning the ethics of an education system which offers parents/carers an opportunity to segregate their children by (their) religion.

In the final section of this article, I examine how and why active consideration of identities, place and time-space are of value to education.

## Conclusions: the importance of identities, place and time-space in education

This research has revealed both the richness of the young people's geographies, and the complexities they face in navigating life in London. As Rachel's story shows, whilst London has offered her the freedom to change religion, it has also left her negotiating different

perspectives in different spaces and places as she constructs her identities. Furthermore, whilst the reasons for, and types of, friction of distance (Harvey, 1990) that the young people feel varies, this is something all members of the storytelling and geography group express that they have experienced because of their religion. This can be seen as a deeply problematic element of London as a world city (Massey, 2008) and representative of the complexities of navigating religion and identities in a neoliberal urban environment (Dwyer, 2016). Put another way, it can be seen as representative of the reciprocal relationships between people, place and time-space (Figure 3). However, whilst the young people express that there are social imaginations which represent individuals, or even entire religions, negatively, they all agree this is morally wrong and support one another. In this act, they are challenging what they perceive to be a dominant narrative, they are producing space and contributing to a better London.

The young people who kindly gave up their time to take part in this research are just five of the 8.9 million people (Trust for London, 2020) who live in London today. Although the millions share a city, each person has their own imaginations, geographies and experiences – each person shapes, and is shaped by, London and the world that exists beyond its boundaries. The young people are all beings, becomings and doings, who have the power and potential to create their own spaces and places, and 'to become and do something different, something yet unimaginable' (Aitken, 2018, pp. 10–11). This is an enormously powerful imagination of young people, yet they are not always represented or constructed in this way, and are sometimes subordinated in, and by, both society and schooling (Catling, 2014)

Every day teachers make decisions about curriculum and pedagogy; they balance a complex web of student needs, curriculum prescription and choice, and decisions about how to teach (Lambert & Morgan, 2010), all in the context of school and education systems (Morgan, 2019), communities and neighbourhoods. By considering identities, place and time-space, and truly engaging with the question 'who are the children we teach?', as well as questions of purpose, curriculum and pedagogy, educators can become more informed in their curriculum making and empower children in, and through, their schooling.

Educators can do this through active consideration of the relationships between schooling and educational institutions, and the communities they serve. Educators can also do this through respecting and valuing the everyday geographies and identities of the children and young people they teach through both what they teach, and how they teach it (Catling & Martin, 2011; Hammond, 2021, 2022; Roberts, 2014, 2017). For example, as this article has shown through the illustrative example of religion and identities in London, there are reciprocal relationships between people, place and time-space. Narratives such as those shared by the young people in this research may well also be shared with educators during informal discussions at break, during tutor time or during lessons in subjects including religious education, history and geography. Children and young people might share narratives like these for reasons including – but not limited to – responding to events in the world to help them to make sense of situations and/or contestations between people; accessing support due to bullying or discrimination; or in response to ideas or case studies being discussed in a lesson, in which their pre-existing ideas, knowledge and imaginations may be challenged or affirmed.

To enable educators to engage with young people about these ideas – for example, in a lesson on urban geography – it's important that they also engage with the geographies of those they teach. As Roberts (2010, p. 6) argues 'knowledge cannot simply be "delivered" to students. Students need to make sense of it themselves. This involves connecting new information and ideas with what they already know and understand'. Whilst how a teacher does this will be context dependent, active consideration of young people's everyday lives and identities, and their places and spaces, can be beneficial in informing how a teacher responds. For example, this might be done through engaging young people with disciplinary ideas to support them in contextualising their experiences of a place, supporting them in contributing to debates about a local or global issue, or supporting children in engaging with enquiries to help develop their understanding of places and ideas.

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