**Creating diversification through hybrid identities and educational encounter: the power of a third space.**

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Abstract

This paper explores the contextual factors that support the necessity of a diversified curriculum. I draw on the findings of my doctoral research to consider the complexities underpinning the educational narratives of South Asian Muslim women. The paper critically examines their position as migrant daughters and how they navigated colonial systems and the practices and behaviours inherent in these. Situated in an inner-city racialised area with a framing by policymakers as one that creates spatial anxiety, participants shared empowered and agentic narratives. These demonstrated a resistance to the othering and stigma that often ensues through stereotyping.
The project adopted a feminist participatory approach and made use of hauntology as both a theoretical and methodological framework. In keeping with this, 4 participants who had grown up in the area and still lived there, were spoken in the form of research conversations, a walking tour and photographs of significant sites.
The paper provides empirical insights into how these four participants encountered education. By frequenting both formal and informal educational settings, these spaces became a crucial third space which alleviated unsettlement though allowing a more embodied occupation with learning. Teachers played a critical role in cultivating appropriate and supportive environments and were described and inferred to be moral agents and figures who assisted their navigation of a space, often embodying a more mentor-like disposition. Teachers proved to embody a practical wisdom, acting as anchors for offering spaces in and outside of the classroom that invited occupation and construction. Such spaces at school, enabled the encountering of difference through recognising firstly, the similarities with peers. Whether these commonalities were cultural or otherwise, it provided a firm foundation from which to imagine and push the parameters of the space and identity; and so school was likely another crucial space for hybridity.
The research approach is specific to the context(s), narratives and migratory moment of the participants and although their accounts have been re-storied to honour their voices, it may lack generalisability. The paper raises two key implications; firstly by recognising educational settings as a third space for students to create a hybrid identity; and secondly through familial, community and navigational capitals which have the potential to shift the pedagogical approaches underpinning the conditions created for students.
It is crucial to point out that hybrid identities without the frequenting of space, are hauntological and cannot reconcile cultural differences because they are out of place and without location, remain troubled and alienated. This is a situation that I describe as cultural hauntology; a condition which draws on both hybridity and hauntology to illuminate unsettlement long after colonisation. The native culture is never fully banished or forgotten. It exists behind the closed doors of homes, within communities and perhaps even within the demarcation lines of a given geographical area.  Cultural hauntology comes about as a deep-seated internal colonisation that appears as traces, marks and murmurs that cannot be deleted. Perhaps what alleviated the extent of what might have been more extreme in its dissonance, were the teachers, mentors and role models that participants repeatedly referenced as agents that bridged and enabled them.

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Keywords: education, decolonisation, hybridity, thirdspace

**Introduction and context**

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to a set of contextual factors which frame the urgency for diversifying approaches to the curriculum. Here I draw on the findings of my doctoral research which explored how geographical location intersected with educational settings to create a spatial hybridity in the narratives of South Asian Muslim women in a Midlands city in the UK. This paper begins by outlining the context for this study before exploring my use of hauntology as both a methodological and theoretical lens to support the thesis of the project.

The study was situated in an inner-city area of North Birmingham; a city located in the West Midlands of the UK. Setting the scene of this place provides crucial insights in terms of the backdrop for the participants’ narratives and what these might tell us about the role of the educational space. The area is well known for its famous football club which commands a powerful position as a symbol of status, capital and whiteness. It’s presence and the subsequent representation is significant in the midst of what has become home to diverse migrant communities from ex-commonwealth countries since the second world war. The waves of migration into the area are known and visible in the shops and businesses which fill the high street, forming an integral part of the local economy. There is a distinct politics of representation here which is often overlooked in such instances. Policies often have an impact on the subsequent documentation that is produced by local government and often reinforces divisions of poverty and prosperity (Ledwith, 2015) which problematise areas like this; that are often conceptualised and framed through its economic participation and output. Such framings are shaped by the local council data which has significant power to shape places like this, echoing the notion of uneven geographies. Furthermore, the narrative that this data tells is reductionist. It tells a story of deficit; of high levels of joblessness in a racialised neighbourhood. The result is one of a spatialised anxiety which alerts us to a troubling sense about the geographies of power. This area – like many others that it is comparable to – has been subject to interventions with limited success. There is a coloniality and ‘correction’ inferred in such approaches which again, is a significant part of the context for the area. At its root, is the acceptance, adherence and upholding of dominant cultural expressions.

A key objective of the study was to bring to the fore, the counter-narratives; those accounts that challenged and problematised ideas of a spatialised anxiety with uneducated residents, contesting the reductive and stereotypical assumptions that went along with these.

**Methodology**

The methodological approach adopted was in part, a response to challenge interventionism and the saviour discourse (Straubhaar, 2015). My position as a South Asian Sikh woman was as significant as it was problematic. I was aware that like my participants, I was the daughter of South Asian economic migrants. However, I also understood that I represented a community known for assimilation and affluence. Having once lived close to Aston myself, I was aware that my parents had moved us several times to more affluent neighbourhoods and towns as key markers of economic progress. There were many nuanced power imbalances including the very nature of the research which was for a doctorate; and whether I wanted to or not, I was aware that my presence brought with it a particular narrative of education as a capital.

The research participants were all South Asian Muslim women who had grown up in the Aston area and still lived in or around it. These women had moved with their parents, into the Aston area post WW2; a particular social and historical moment which became the unspoken landscape and backdrop to the narratives that were shared. This paper draws on the conversations with two participants; Mashkura and Fozia.

An intersectional feminist participatory approach was adopted for many reasons; to centre voice (Billo and Heimstra, 2017) and storytelling (Letherby, 2003; Smart, 2014); to situate participants in the research; to co-construct meaning (Sallah, 2014; Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2017) and to enable the appearance of an authentic or rather, a decolonised self. This approach was underpinned by a hauntological (Gordon, 2008) lens which emerged as a result of the narratives that were shared. Hauntology as an ontology and as a way of being encouraged a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on different theoretical traditions and from the disciplines of Cultural Studies and Sociology. Jeung-eun Rhee (2020) argues that hauntology or *rememory*, is a feminist practice in that it “opens up an enclosed (Western) notion of individual and self” (p5)

Hauntology addresses the appearance of the past; that is the spectre of unresolved in the everyday lives of the participants. Hauntology is essentially about the acknowledgment and subversion of time. The work of Avery Gordon (2008) is particularly significant for how this lens evolved. Gordon explores how non-linear time is experienced as the unresolved past continues to appear in the present and the future. Although it has its roots in psychoanalysis, hauntology is highly resonant and relevant for sociologically based research particularly when a) considering the inclusion or presence of some narratives and conversely what does not appear and b) how this lens reveals power imbalances and injustice:

Haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with.

(Gordon, 2008: 2)

Gordon’s assertion makes reference to wider social power structures and its significance for this study was how these might play out for marginalised groups. In terms of this study, there is a clear resonance particularly given the relationship between participants, space and perhaps less explicitly, the state. Gordon’s concern is with a spectral presence that although demanding urgent attention, is one that has to be approached with a self-directed autonomy (2011, p8). It is possible that hauntology contradicts the deleting of history because of its capacity to “haunt back” that is, to respond back and return to what has remained open-ended. Gordon is keen to remind us that the open-ended or the spectral, is not necessarily unfamiliar:

Haunting is not about invisibility or unknowability per se, it refers us to what’s living and breathing in the place hidden from view: people, places, histories, knowledge, memories.

` (Gordon, 2008: 3)

The intention was to keep the focus on the individual experience in order to consider how educational encounters had been experienced with intersecting identities, including the spatial. As an intersectional study that is concerned with critiquing the complexity of intersecting identities, this was as much about an ethical responsibility to the participants by alleviating the power relations between them and myself as the researcher. It was important that rapport and trust were established in order for us to co-create meaningfully. Three research methods were used; an initial discussion, walking interviews and the photographing of significant sites. These methods were particularly significant for a hauntological approach because they brought together the intersection of geographical location, education and identity and above all, how these generated a sense of the unresolved. These methods sought to gain insights into how stories were mobilised through the act of walking and what was captured through photography. The work of Mary-Rose Puttick (2020) considers a variety of visual and sensory forms in her work on the stories told by migrant mothers. Whilst identity was an important feature of this study and an artefacts-based approach like the one adopted by Puttick (2020) may have illuminated further aspects of their narratives, I was interested in how participants – who had grown up in Aston – embodied the place, related to it and produced spaces within and outside of here.

The initial meeting with each participant involved a preliminary research discussion of their experience of both formal and non-formal education. The objective here was to get a general overview of their trajectory and some insight into their narrative. The focus of the discussion was on post-school experiences that were particularly significant for the participant. Participants were to be asked about particular places and memories of significance. These conversations were audio-recorded with consent with whilst the transcription process enabled the identification of emerging themes.

The decision to use walking tour interviews as a primary research method was to enable the mapping of spatial relations between places of significance in the area including home and other sites of educational encounter – whether formal or informal. The intention was to provide participants with the opportunity and agency to narrate their experiences both visually and spatially. It also offered an insight into how participants embody a space and the commentary that accompanies it.

Walking has increasingly been used as a place-making and arts-based method(O’Reilly, 2017) as well as an embodying, relational and sensory act (Springgay and Truman, 2018). From a feminist perspective, this idea of the sensory is also about *affect* and is one that Osgood et al (2020) argue challenges Western modes of knowledge-making; a significant factor for the narratives underpinning this project and how the act of walking worked differently for each of the participants. The work of O’Reilly (2017) however, showed that walking together was rooted in an intention to create collaborative and embodied knowledge; to provide a space for empathic witnessing which would then contribute to a collective story. Like Puttick (2020), O’Reilly (2017) researched the experiences of migrant mothers though her focus on mobile rather than visual methods sought to understand how participants conceptualised and related to spaces.

Walking has a revelatory nature; a particularity for this method as it involved the mobilisation of the body, the voice and the stories that could come through these. The notion of embodiment was key for the study. As a research method, movement was significant as a mechanism for de-conditioning the body. It meant that the familiar was made strange to the participant for example who would consciously take a route and talk about what did and did not relate to the immediate environment. Initially, the walking tour was selected as a method in order to provide an important stimulus for discussion given that it would be a shared kinaesthetic experience connecting the past to the present. Participants were invited to take photographs of particular places that were significant for them and in connection to their educational experiences. Again, audio data was collected at this stage and transcribed. I was especially interested in how it sat with the data collected from the preliminary meeting; the complementary and contradictory alike. This was important in identifying hauntological aspects; notifications of a lingering unresolved social past (Gordon, 2008) and how the unspoken surfaced.

The walk was significant in providing a transgression from the experience and expectations of the traditional interview. Here, it was about noticing the unresolved in the spatial; in the neighbourhoods and encountering of buildings, street signs and side paths that led to somewhere. Of particular interest, was how these encounters affected the body; how the body presented itself as a site of unsettlement; the parts that had hidden in the body’s crevices and were subsequently present through its absence. The body then, became data that invited interpretation, including the sensory system; rejecting the senses as “neutral recorders of experience” (Osgood et al, 2020)

Although a walking interview implied a beginning, middle and end, the narrative often emerged in non-linear ways; these were more so in keeping with particular moments of discussion, and as commentaries that connected with the particular physical space we were in. With Mashkura for instance, there was a marked difference in how she had initially spoke about the area and what it had elicited from her being in the space. The walk had slowed down the pace of her commentary and brought in pauses as we took in the surroundings and buildings. It had announced a different way of being and communicating as we had turned corners, crossed roads and stopped to look at buildings or memorable spaces. In some of these moments, ours had been a wordless conversation. The past was framed as a time of hope that had been mobilised by circumstance and opportunity.

The rationale for participants to take photographs was to contribute a visual aspect to their overall narrative (Mannay, 2016 p11). Visual images have been increasingly used in qualitative research (Mannay, 2016; Puttick, 2020) and are perhaps more prominent now with the proliferation of social media (Reavey, 2011). Another reason to photograph significant places was to provide participants with the autonomy to select and the privacy to do this without the visible presence of a researcher. The final meeting was about creating a space for participants to generate photo elicitation commentaries where their images were used as stimulus for further discussion (Bartoli, 2019: 4). Having taken the photographs on their phones, participants led an explanation and at times, exploration of each photograph. This particular activity was devised with the intention of averting the attention away from the participant to their selection and arrangement of the photographs; in effect *their* artefact and what particular photographs symbolised for them.

Before concluding this section, it is important to address here that the very design and nature of this project highlights the necessity of relevance; of flexibility and understanding. In order to see something else we have to change how we are looking at it and what we do. For instance, whilst hauntology is traditionally understood as a theoretical term, it has been developed for this study, as a methodological endeavour. By doing so, it has brought in nuanced insights and diversified understandings of intersectionality and of educational experience.

**Results**

The participants’ narratives provided rich insights into the different lives of each whilst being underpinned by the migratory moment which drew attention to the strong intersection of the spatial and racial (Neely and Samura, 2011); the historical and present moment and the safety this brought:

Mashkura: This road I’m walking you up now, this was a very different world, really. This is where I felt safe and I spent a lot of my childhood here. There were a lot of relatives living here though they’ve moved out now. So we always felt very loved surrounded by aunts and uncles and our cousins who were quite a bit older than us, so we were really looked after.

Migration to this area had established a spatial occupation and presence within what had once been a desirable place to live. Migratory waves into the area had instigated many Britons to move away to more affluent areas from what would become a racialised and connected to this, an impoverished neighbourhood. Perhaps paradoxically, this appeared as a living and present history as participants pointed out established and traditional architecture; majestic buildings that had once been a library, or a school or a family residence. 

These sites now stood with a spectrality about them. What once was gave way to the now; an abandonment that had created neglect, seen in buildings in need of repair, smashed windows and littered pavements. This however, was very much the lens of an outsider to the area and I was aware that my arrival here was itself, a short-term stop. Being in Aston with the participants then, highlighted the significance of walking together to witness aspects of the spatial relationship.

Fozia’s commentaries frequently reflected a collision of past, present and future signalling a considered re-framing and future focused approach. Here she revealed the importance of belonging and community, particularly in terms of raising her own children in the area:

Fozia: I wouldn’t want to go and live in what you would call a middle class suburb – no way. It’s not what I want for my kids or myself. I think you do have a feel of community, you know you can walk down the high street and still say hello to people and have a chat. You kind of recognize people from when you were young and they know your mum, sort of thing? I think that connection really matters and knowing people will help you out if you need it.

Given the hauntological lens of this project, the narratives went beyond the anticipated intersections of race, gender and space. Moments or rather the strangeness of an unspoken recognition of cultural unsettlement was evident. What started out as an exploration of educational encounters soon pushed the boundaries of educational research as notions of identity and the unspoken began to take prominent positions. The participants were protective and celebratory of the area. It was after all, for most of them where they had chosen to remain, return or live close to as well as raise their families. For Fozia, a bus stop close to where she had lived, signified independence. It connected her neighbourhood and the city centre; an important space for her to develop her identity.

A key finding of this study was how the educational space played out as a third space. Interactions within both formal and informal educational settings revealed how participants participated, perceived and gained from an educational system that had at its heart, practices and behaviours that were rooted in coloniality in terms of systems and of course, the curriculum. This was primarily through the third space (Takhar, 2016; Soja 1996) created within these settings and became the grounds for participation and identity construction.

Mashkura: There were 22 of us doing our A levels in this under-performing school. We were a diverse group and became really good friends. We all wanted to do well and support each other. Would you believe that 3 went on to do Medicine and one of us went to Oxford? That was the calibre of what we had in this inner-city school and it came from the conversations we were having. We would put the world to rights sat in our common room. We were having these quite intellectual conversations about race and multi-culturalism. Back then we didn’t really know these terms. They weren’t in fashion.

There is a distinct clarity in Mashkura’s commentary and an agency that is rooted in an active construction of identity. This is especially significantbecause partaking in educational settings that were based around structures and cultures that were often alien, are reminders of encounters that are altogether radical. These encounters are the moments where individuals are disrupting the norms and values of a culture from another context of which time is a significant part of. These encounters reflected Takhar’s (2016) recognition of the disruptive third space where identity and history come together.

In addition to the third space, there was a clear sense of *spatial hybridity*; that the third space nature of a setting, also created a sense of hybridity. For all participants, the adolescent years in particular, had been a crucial time when spaces for hybridity were sought. Secondary school in the main, offered this. These spaces were actively used by the participants to invent and re-invent a hybrid identity across repeated visits in a productive in / out dialectic. A space for constructing a hybrid identity also became the work and focus for both Mashkura and Fozia who continue to work in the interests of their community as a way of extending the invitation for others to explore. Acutely aware of Aston as a place that could potentially be insular for its residents if they did not engage with the city or networks outside of it, there was a determination to re-launch community projects as a space for encountering difference

This is a key example of the role of informal education in the guise of community projects and initiatives. Formal and informal educational spaces were significant for offering participants a crucial third space (Bhabha, 1994; Soja 1996). Such spaces played an important role in the construction of a hybrid identity particularly because they were frequented often. This meant that recurring visits to a space by the participants, offered them possibilities for creating and experimenting with a hybrid identity before they returned home which was a place where they were culturally anchored. Consequently, what might have been a jarring collision of practices and values, became a powerful third space (Soja, 1996); a space for hybrid identities to form and participants over time, could negotiate and re-negotiate aspects of these identities. One consequence of this access to a third space was the lessening of the unsettlement that is brought about by a hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994). This third space was key for the participants in terms of offering a “space of possibility” (Hooks, 2003) in which to observe, construct and practice identities that connected their homes, communities and educational environments.

Connected to these findings were Yosso’s (2005) framework of community cultural wealth which identifies six cultural capitals that ethnically diverse students bring to the classroom: aspirational; linguistic; familial, social, navigational and resistance. The significance of these capitals is their located-ness in complex and intersecting identities. There is also a sense in which these create a powerful alternative to the normative culture. Crucially, Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth provides a necessary insight and urgency to consider the potency of a third space (Takhar, 2016; Soja 1996).

The participants’ accounts revealed agency, traditional educational success and a commitment to use particular social capitals as tools; familial and navigational as mobilisers and enablers of identity (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge that is nurtured primarily, within families. Within the educational settings, participants could draw on values and stories from their home communities to add to what was being taught. Often this was done more informally in friendship groups. Nonetheless, it created an environment that honoured some of the elders’ stories and wisdom as well as evoking participation. The notion of participation is in keeping with the work of Lisa Stephenson (2020) whose innovative story-making methodology has invited school aged British Pakistani girls in drama work that narrativises imaginary characters. Navigational capital refers to the ability to navigate institutions and systems that are hostile of the differences of non-racialised students. This was highlighted as a strength which came from integrating different encounters from formal and informal settings, relationships with teachers and mentors and a strong sense of who and what was predominantly represented without it being either a deterrent or indeed, to their detriment.

Yosso’s capitals allowed an active construction of identity as a result of being in the third space and the frequenting and variety of educational spaces including the formal and informal such as the community space.

**Cultural hauntology**

It is crucial to point out however, that hybrid identities alone and without the frequenting of space, are hauntological. Haunted identities cannot always reconcile cultural differences because they are out of place and without location, remain troubled and alienated. This is a situation that I describe as *cultural hauntology;* acondition which draws on both hybridity and hauntology to illuminate unsettlement long after colonisation. The native culture is never fully banished or forgotten. It exists behind the closed doors of homes, within communities and perhaps even within the demarcation lines of a given geographical area. Cultural hauntology comes about as a deep-seated internal colonisation that appears as traces, marks and murmurs that cannot be deleted. Regardless of whether individuals resist and have agency, this cultural hauntology flags up that which has been pushed out of sight. It manifests itself in a spectral sense and its protest is the colonised self that demanded assimilation as part of the migration deal.

Cultural hauntology provides a useful insight into acknowledging that despite a successful formal education that has given participants graduate status, there are familial and cultural expectations that create a marked tension and a certain re-turn. The participants’ narratives reveal the masking of a deep unsettlement that surfaces through implicit and subtle moments. This unsettlement is about an incessant cultural hauntology whereby religio-cultural patterns within a neoliberal (Peck et al, 2018) social world, dictate behaviours that are replicable and well-rehearsed. It infers a deep-set coloniality that is encountered on a bodily level. A keyreflection to share here was how the *body* had responded to context and to culture; how it was that the body became shaped by the environment, responding to what it needed to become. In this case, it might be described as a re-colonised response to participating in the labour market. This participation was born of a hybrid identity with dynamism and resistance at its heart; a protest that assimilation could not be blindly entered into and that the notion of identity was not fixed but fluid and continuously re-negotiated (Hall, 2017).

Perhaps what alleviated the extent of what might have been more extreme in its dissonance, were the teachers, mentors and role models that participants repeatedly referenced as agents that bridged and enabled them. Teachers played a critical role in cultivating appropriate and supportive environments and were described and inferred to be moral agents and figures who assisted their navigation of a space, often embodying a more mentor-like disposition. Teachers proved to embody a practical wisdom, (Hooks, 2003; Heilbrohn, 2008) acting as anchors for offering spaces in and outside of the classroom that invited occupation and construction. Such spaces at school, enabled the encountering of difference through recognising firstly, the similarities with peers. Whether these commonalities were cultural or otherwise, it provided a firm foundation from which to imagine and push the parameters of the space and identity; and so school was likely another crucial space for hybridity.

The teachers provided a gateway between the classroom and the world beyond it. One participant talked at length about the many theatre visits and drama projects that were suggested to her by her teachers. This is resonant with the notion of relational pedagogy (Ljungblad, 2019) which centres on the relationship between teacher and student as a precursor to any further learning exchange. Perhaps more fitting is the notion of a hidden pedagogy where relationships along with tacit and intuitive knowing form the foundation for promoting values and character development; a subtle but sensitive approach. Consequently, this navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) contributed to participants’ confidence in finding their way through unfamiliar systems and understanding the practicalities of managing everyday life through knowing about finance for instance. It is important to highlight that this was not a readily available resource that could be drawn on by anyone; the financial capital came as a result of navigational capital; participants moving into spaces where they could access it. The accessing of it was significant because it meant that they could then obtain it.

Another participant commented on working hard because she respected her teachers and did not want to let them down, suggesting a relational pedagogy facilitated by hybridity. It was notable that it was the teachers at secondary school – rather than at primary school, college or university - that received more attention in the participants’ narratives. This could of course, be attributed to the memory attached to the school buildings which were identified during the walks. Equally, it suggested that for the participants, the adolescent years were a crucial time when spaces for hybridity were sought out. The focus on teachers could signify that they were noticed for creating a sense of community in the classroom, creating a culture of reflexivity and dialogue that would become a more normative basis for conversations (Hooks, 2003). The role of the teacher as a facilitator of a purposeful educational environment together with the spaces that the participants actively produced, is resonant with Hooks’ work titled *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope* (2003) where she argues that cultivating an inclusive community is key to creating hope through pedagogy. This pedagogy of hope is built on how aware students and teachers are of themselves in their respective roles (teachers or students) *and* as human beings. There is an emphasis on interpersonal relationships between teachers and students – and amongst students – that allow for critical conversations that are underpinned by reflexivity and dialogue. The value of school was therefore, as much as about learning to *be* as it was about passing exams to achieve qualifications. Essentially, the participants’ experiences of their teachers point to pedagogical philosophies that were embodied, responsive and flexible. It was as much about what the teachers taught as how they facilitated the space. Whilst it was important that they understood their local communities and families, the culture and space that teachers created in the classroom contributed to who the participants became and how that time was remembered.

The role of mentors as assistors, moral agents and role models emerged several times in the narratives shared by both Fozia and Mashkura.

Fozia: I wouldn’t have gone to university if my teacher and youth worker hadn’t come to my house. You do need older people who fight for you and be your advocate to explain to parents what it’s about, because university and doing all this other stuff wasn’t the norm in Aston.

The visibility of other South Asian women from arts organisations leading creative projects across the city, was a crucial point of recognition and arrival for them. These women had a key and pivotal role play as spatial brokers. They mirrored visually and representationally, someone *like* them; someone who was creating and innovating to amplify the dispositions of diasporic communities of a culture, ethnicity and gender that was like their own. Importantly, for some of the participants, it marked a path that was already part paved by women who had come before them.

Fozia: I realised that there’s a whole thing with who you see and what role models you have. This woman was one of my biggest role models, she was my mentor. I thought if she can do it, I don’t see why we can’t.

Fozia’s mentor was a key figure for enabling an implicit and explicit validation of an emergent hybrid identity that paid homage to heritage, diaspora and the dominant culture outside of these spaces.

**Discussion and implications**

There are two key implications raised by this study that can inform discussions and reflections on approaches to a diversified curriculum; the role played by educational settings as a third space for students to create a hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994); the alternative capitals such as the familial, community and navigational (Yosso, 2005).

The educational space as a third space has the potential to shift what is deemed to be worthy and credible as both knowing and being. The *third space* – according to Bhabha (1994) has the potential to reverse structures of domination which has significance for students from marginalised groups. Rather than a stringent reversal however, the third space suggests a shift in *whose* presence – or indeed *perspective* – dominates and more importantly, what students of different backgrounds bring to this space. This has particular implications about developing pedagogies of trust and relationality as there is a risk here of further othering and thereby silencing groups because of their ‘difference.’

The third space is also where identities are negotiated and continuously re-negotiated as the narratives of the research participants revealed. For an educational context, the third space that I am advocating for here is one that is co-created through a co-labouring by students as much as teachers. Whilst the third space may appear peripheral, in reality it has the potential to be much more profound. It is the construction of a hybrid identity within this space that offers a possibility of transformation through seemingly insignificant moments to create a self that sits amidst contradictory cultural practices. For the participants of this project, their relationship to and frequenting of different educational spaces, opened up an access to observe, try out and construct identities and enact possible future selves.

Takhar (2016) alludes to the third space as one that inhabits the margin and conceptualises this further as “a type of disruption and coming together of history and identity” which does two things. Firstly, it acknowledges and situates the intersection of the socio-historical and geopolitical moment which is a key factor in contextualising the nuances of identity. Secondly, it frames the possibility of a third space as a site of resistance; a resistance to a fixed identity; the binaries of coloniality and the diasporic culture. There is a politics about this marginality which requires attention. In this context, being on the periphery is an empowered and liberating position. It may well contradict traditional ideas about agency as being situated at the core and understood as necessarily occupying a centralised and visible space.

Whilst there is a set of particularities about the specific identities of this study’s participants, there are wide ranging implications for how a diversified approach to the curriculum would enhance and nourish the educational experience of many young people of intersecting identities. There are marginalised groups outside of the identities discussed in this paper that equally frequent the classroom space as an environment that is stimulating, promotes critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) and rouses curiosity. Such environments are a constant and equally offer possibilities of other selves, inviting these to be present without compromise or apology.

A question to ask of ourselves when we think about educational settings, is the extent to which we make space for alternative capitals, ways of knowing and being that can reconcile the coloniality of a system that serves to further marginalise and other. Whilst the participants of my project developed the navigational capital to enable this, it was also a result of the conditions that were set for them; that is the informal spaces within educational settings that allowed the mirroring, translating and becoming.

**Conclusion**

The stance of this paper is that to diversify the curriculum necessitates first of all, a diversification and re-imagination of the *approach* to the curriculum. Whether that involves a co-production of learning or whether this calls for a rethinking of pedagogical philosophy so that teachers focus on re-addressing the *conditions* created in the learning environment – that is, how these are set and who is responsible for doing so. This could well feed into a wider argument about the co-labouring of the learning environment that uses dialogue, reflexivity, critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) and a pedagogy of hope (Hooks, 2003) to engage and enhance notions of identity. In short, it is about the *how* of working with a curriculum rather than the what; it is about an approach that invites the re-imaginings of alternative future selves by moving beyond individual or projected parameters for what could be possible.

Diversifying the curriculum is not a stand alone intervention. First and foremost, it requires a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the contextual factors that make up the histories, biographies and spatialities of students. To diversify the curriculum means that the educational environment is itself, diverse and critically so in terms of its representation as the participants’ experiences of informal education have highlighted. For students to “see someone like me” is not to be underestimated in the potential this has for what could be. To recognise and understand that this space invites for many students, an active construction of self-hood, of identity and critical consciousness (Freire, 1974), means that the *how* of teaching, learning and assessment is addressed as much as what is taught. That is, the factors and the intent that inform the *how* that give strength and prominence for a diversified approach. Equally, it is paramount that teachers and mentors have a critical recognition of their own positionalities and what these might represent.

Whilst the argument of this paper is based on a particular set of findings, it is important that educators connect an understanding of who their students are with what it is they teach, how it is taught, who it is taught by and opportunities to cultivate the conditions that allow an active construction of identity and its connection to the learning, the practical and the world beyond. Spatial hybridity offers a useful way of re-imagining the pedagogical space, the relationship(s) to and within these and what these enable students to become. This will come as no surprise to many who are already attuned to their own version of this approach in their practice. It remains imperative that to diversify pedagogy or the curriculum necessarily requires a critique of the dominant cultural expressions that inform the structures and routines that have come to be understood as normative and often, superior.

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