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'You don't realise they're helping you until you realise they're helping you': reconceptualising adultism through community music

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ABSTRACT

Recent work in children's geographies and geographies of education has presented the argument that when conceptualising the various roles that adults occupy in children's lives, it is equally important to conceptualise adultism. In this paper we argue that this existing work critiques adultism's logics but does not adequately conceptualise adultism's structural and scalar spatialities. We reconceptualise adultism as a structural and scalar phenomenon by examining our case study of a community music programme designed to reconnect children with their 'learning identities'. We borrow the spatial metaphor of 'chains' from human geography's postcapitalist literature to highlight how adultism structurally pervades this space of resistance, underscoring the more broadly applicable point that practices of resistance that fail to address adultism's co-creative relationships with other structures of domination can end-up reasserting adultist relations. However, towards the end of the paper we argue that this reconceptualisation of adultism does not mean community music (or other critical pedagogies) should be abandoned, rather illustrating how the organisation in our case study innovate in order to address adultism's structural and scalar facets.

Introduction

In Smith et al.'s (2022) edited collection entitled 'Introducing Young People to "Unfamiliar Landscapes"', the editor's concluding essay reflects upon the role of adults in children and young people's lives. The role and position of the adult has and – as this collection illustrates – continues to be a pertinent problematic within children's geographies and geographies of education (Kraftl 2013). Adults frequently occupy significant roles in children's lives, often acting as gatekeepers mediating children's participation in various worlds. Indeed, envisaging children's lives somehow autonomous from adult influence, benefcent or malign, is almost impossible. But attending in detail to adults' roles as 'coaches, guides, parents' (Smith et al., 2022) and more, a range of children's geographies and geographies of education are developing concepts that interrogate the practising of these roles, articulated within different power structures of class, race, gender, sexuality and dis/ ability, as they press upon children's lives (e.g. *cultural geographies'* special issue on the geographies of education (2016, Vol. 23(1)).

However, the position of the adult – and particularly their privilege *as adults* – is often under-theorised, lurking in the background of studies of intergenerational encounters as inadvertent assumptions about the power that adults have 'over' children (Barajas 2022). As both Barajas (2022) and Wall (2019) have recently argued, it is important here to the foreground and conceptualise *adultism* – in short, the automatic structural privilege adults (seemingly) hold as distinct from children (Rollo et al. 2020) – as a structure analogous to racism or sexism. For these scholars, adultism is crucial to understanding the subaltern experience of children and increasing the urgency of including children's voices in research and policy, not only as a critique of intergenerational ethics, but of the myriad systems that harbour oppressive assumptions about children.

Adultism has been defined variously (Douthirt-Cohen and Tokunaga 2020, 207), but contemporary framings of it (Barajas 2022; Mills 2016) are most pithily summed-up in an earlier conceptualisation by Flasher (1978, 521) who defines it as the practice of social relations that exclude those identified as children from social experiences of 'mutually constructive interdependency'. Adultism denigrates children's credibility (Alderson 2008), exaggerates their dependency (valentine 2011), and – regarding education – frames them as 'empty vessels relegated to receiving … deposits of knowledge made by teachers' (Bettencourt 2020, 157). Adultism thereby props up unequal intergenerational relationships and undergirds practices that rely partially upon the marginalisation of children's agency.

In this paper we argue that children's geographies and geographies of education must recover an understanding of adultism as a structuring of social relations that renders children as inferior and dependent, intersecting with and – crucially – reasserting itself in co-producing (with sexism, racism and more) pervasive structures of domination (Smyth and Hewitson 2015). We extend Barajas and Wall's critique of how adultism has been conceptualised to-date to develop new understandings about how adultism is structured and should/can be resisted. Children's geographies and geographies of education have so far conceived of adultism in relative isolation from other varieties of domination, produced through isolated instances of poor adult-to-child ethics, rather than situating it as integral to the spatial structurings of policy, culture, and economy (Kraftl et al. 2021).

Previous engagements with adultism in children's geographies have been fleeting or engaged it in synonymous terms, discussing the need to disrupt 'age-based hierarchy' (Blaisdell 2017, 278) or 'adult hegemony' (Gulczyńska 2019, 414) for children to become 'full members of society' (Blaisdell 2017, 278). What is more, cutting-edge work that structurally reconceptualises adultism has so far concentrated on attacking its logics through counter-theorisation (Warming 2020). This includes promoting a 'childist' programme (i.e. reorienting idealisation of children to accommodate their positional knowledge (Wall 2019)) and reconceptualising adult privilege as 'automatic' rather than 'unearned' due to the fact that children are often unable to 'earn' the privileges that adults can (Barajas 2022). Although critiquing adultist logics, this work does not capture the importance of scale in the conceptualisation of adultism's structural form, which would enable children's geographies better to understand how adultism is *spatially reproduced*, reasserted and resisted. Such a structurally reassertive and scalar conceptualisation of adultism is what we offer in this paper.

In a metatheoretical register, we conceptualise adultism as being formed from 'chains' of relationships at a significant scale of proliferation and enmeshment with other structures of domination (Smyth and Hewitson 2015), encircling and traversing sites of resistance. We borrow this 'chain' understanding of scalar relations from work on geographies of postcapitalism that question the flat/site ontologies that have become popular across human geography, including children's geographies (Ansell 2009; Schmid and Smith 2021; Warming 2020). We argue that, although 'nested' ideas of scale are now rightly being critiqued, a flat ontology foregrounding the resistant capabilities of site – exploring the different kinds of relationship or ethics that site can engender (Ash 2020) – needs to be tempered by a sense in which 'chains' of hegemonic relationships still constrict site's subversive potential. Certainly these chains of relations are co-produced and resisted *through* site, but the highly proliferative and coherent nature of such relationships arguably endangers site's resistant capacity more often than site threatens fully to undermine hegemony. Despite

this perhaps gloomy reading of structure and scale, 'chain' theories of scale and hegemony offer alter-proliferations as a way of constructing and conceptualising rivals to hegemonic systems (Gibson-Graham 2008). Towards the end of this paper we duly move from an emphasis on adultism's proliferative scalarity towards understanding how anti-adultist proliferations might be fostered by resisting and routing around or beyond adultism's snares.

We develop this conceptualisation of adultism by analysing our case study of a community music[1] programme in central Scotland, designed to afford students that struggle to engage with school alternative ways to explore 'learning identities' (Smyth and Hewitson 2015, 695). By 'learning identities' we mean the part of a person's self-image that recognises themselves as desiring to learn, which – as much recent geography of education has highlighted – undermines the notion of school, conventionally defined, as the pre-eminent learning space (Kraftl 2013). There is a considerable literature regarding 'best practice' within community music studies – and the critical pedagogies literature it draws on (Steinberg and Brown 2020) – aimed at combatting adultism by focussing on the different kinds of relationship and learning identities that a reflexive intergenerational ethics enables (Olson 2005). Contrasting intergenerational relations that privilege adult authority with more interdependent relationships – treating children as *different* rather than *incomplete* subjects (valentine 2011) – this literature often focuses on adult pedagogy's ethical missteps around children, allowing the inference that adultism *is* these ethical missteps (Bettencourt 2020). Furthermore, these literatures often posit children's resistance to adultism as a reason to hope that adultist ethics and pedagogy might, encounter-by-encounter, be expunged. These themes of best ethical practice and children's resistive agency reappear in the work of Dickens and Lonie (2013; also Lonie and Dickens 2016), who have already brought community music – as a vector for liberated children and liberatory pedagogy – to the attention of children's geographies. That said, Dickens and Lonie's work – which demonstrates how young people develop their learning identities by traversing diverse pedagogical spaces – does not adequately address how adultism is reasserted through a proliferative scalarity against attempts by community musicians (and other critical pedagogues) to initiate best practice and facilitate children's agency (Kraftl 2015).

This paper demonstrates that despite – and oftentimes as a result – of attempts by community musicians to be attentive to intergenerational ethics and respect children's agency, adultism reemerges from cleavages within these practices, reasserting adultist relations in spaces of nascent intergenerational interdependence. However, in sketching out this pervasive infusion of adultism and tracing its reassertion through vectors like 'best ethical practice' and 'respecting children's agency', we clear the ground to begin thinking about counter-proliferative solutions to adultism's insidious structuring. Therefore, after describing our case study and methodology, the paper explores three techniques whereby the community music facilitators we researched with addressed adultism, illustrating how these techniques contained cleavages through which adultism was reasserted. And yet, close analysis of these techniques also eventually points towards a proliferative scalar strategy for going beyond adultism. We examine how facilitators (i) used performance to address the 'human scale' of intergenerational relationships (Kraftl 2015, 225), (ii) built group interdependence to enhance children's agency, and (iii) reframed learning to increase participation in community music, critiquing educational policy, and develop a nascent counter-proliferation of intergenerational interdependence. To conclude, we outline the wider implications for children's geographies and geographies of education when adultism is reconceptualized as structural and proliferative, requiring a rival, anti-adultist proliferation to overturn it.

Case study and methods

Our case study – the COOL Music project – was a collaboration between Glasgow Caledonian University and Heavy Sound Community Interest Company (henceforth HS), funded by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF – created by the Scottish Government and the European Social Fund). From April 2019 until March 2020, HS visited five locations in central Scotland weekly – spread

across the urban context of Edinburgh's sprawl into East Lothian – delivering nine-week participatory songwriting courses. In sessions lasting two hours, HS worked with groups of three-to-six young people, aged between 8 and 18, who were struggling to engage with formal schooling, often – but not exclusively – because of additional issues such as bullying, domestic violence, or living in areas with a high SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). Two-to-six facilitators rearranged classrooms or community centres to facilitate socialising, and to accommodate HS's music equipment. Facilitators encouraged participants to use HS's creative resources. These included a box of art supplies and several musical instruments. If participants did not want to make anything, then the space was simply somewhere for them to relax.

Two facilitators with social work and community music skills worked with young people individually, writing lyrics. This was a space for young people to discuss – if they wanted to – their difficulties in engaging with school, but also, usually unprompted, how they were processing traumatic experiences like neglect and domestic violence (Caló et al. 2019). The strong one-to-one relationships developed between participants and facilitators were geared towards building interdependence amongst the whole group of facilitators and participants, facilitating collective understandings-of and strategies-for-developing participants' learning identities. Facilitators believed this approach might generate hope about the future and develop participants' savviness, equipping them to deal with emotionally challenging situations and, crucially, to reengage – albeit in a more 'curated' form – a wider ecology of care and education (Steiner et al. 2018). HS's website states that by engaging 'nurturing approaches', they aim to 'improve social, emotional, and educational attainment' by making 'learning work for disengaged young people … through … participant led music … production'.[2]

It is worth noting here that being backed by SIF gave HS a way to address the Scottish Government but also rendered them accountable to SIF's 'deliverables'. This meant that HS had to 'reach' at least one hundred participants between April 2019 and March 2020, and were not – at least formally – supported to be pedagogically innovative; rather, SIF was geared towards funding 'new ideas/products/services that demonstrate … positive impact and are … [financially] sustainable'[3], and to '[scaling] up new ideas and solutions to tackle poverty and disadvantage'. The ramifications of this disjuncture between HS and SIF's *raisons d'être* will be expanded upon later in the paper, underscoring Kraftl et al.'s (2021) point that geographies of education must critically assess 'how government policies have affected the education of marginalised or excluded groups' (p.4).

The project was evaluated based on a qualitative analysis of twenty participant interview transcripts, sixteen project stakeholder interview transcripts (including teachers, social workers, and facilitators), focus group transcripts (one with participants, one with facilitators), and field diaries, all generated by two COOL Music researchers. Initial open coding (Jackson 2001) drew out themes that addressed our research questions and literature review. Then, through team discussions, we settled on axial codes (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) to create a 'pathway' (p.46) through the research, identifying themes that connected the open codes. Hence the focus of this paper on practices of performance, interdependence, and reframing learning.

Performance, the 'human scale', and ethical interdependence

Community music – a form of participatory art – is a collective process of creativity that foregrounds inclusion and participation over proficiency, prioritising the transformation of the artists and their relationships over 'successful' outputs (Higgins and Willingham 2017). Music-making has been used frequently to engage marginalised groups to various ends; creating community, challenging injustice, and developing confidence (Higgins and Willingham 2017). Although geographers have been interested in participatory art as a way of transforming social relations (Diprose 2015), it has received less attention in children's geographies and geographies of education, apart from, of course, Lonie and Dickens' (2016) work (see also Askins and Pain 2011). This is despite a significant literature amongst academic-practitioners regarding its educational, therapeutic, and

social utility for young people, especially those who suffer from additional forms of marginalisation (Olson 2005).

There is a significant body of work that analyses how community music enables young people to develop new kinds of relationships with peers and facilitators to create spaces of intergenerational interdependence (Boeskov 2017). Key amongst these practices has been *performance* as a way of enabling young people to express complex emotions and experiment with different identities that might enable them to identify hopes, fears, and capacities that were previously obscured (Richardson 2013). This framing and role of performance – as a vector for creatively rewiring repressions – has been used across various participatory art practices as a way of making an approachable offer of participation to marginalised groups (Dickens and Lonie 2013). Often, despite its seemingly innocuous playfulness, performance can transform participants' understanding of themselves and their place in the world by temporarily suspending the need to reproduce hegemony, allowing new affects to emerge (Diprose 2015).

However, the positive potentials of performance in participatory art have not always been thought through rigorously enough in geographies of education. Often, performance is framed as a way of generating more trusting relationships between those co-creating a space without appreciating the significant body of literature that highlights how performance exposes the performing subject through their self-exploration (Askins and Pain 2011). The creation of more trusting intergenerational relationships has been explored by Kraftl through the concept of the 'human scale' (2015, 225). Kraftl argues that 'the human scale' is deployed in educational settings as a 'concept that promotes smallness … privileging … more … intimate and 'meaningful' interactions between children and adults' (2015, 228–229) contrasting this with disciplinary approaches to children's bodies. In this section, we explore how HS facilitators tried to develop intergenerational interdependences with – and between – participants by facilitating performance spaces infused with 'human scale' relationships. We illustrate how the vulnerabilities that performance invariably generates created social pressures that resulted in adultism's reassertion.

Although we will examine participant's experiments with performance in this section, it is important to first acknowledge that facilitators also experimented with performance. In the process of building trust with participants, facilitators deliberately performed certain roles. Vinny (Facilitator), said that his role was to be 'a wee bit more energised version' of himself. He explained that he projected this persona to see which musical equipment piqued participants' interest, creating pathways for them into performance. Facilitators' performances were, however, directed as part of an encompassing strategy; disavowing the role of 'adult educator'. As Ruairidh (Facilitator) expressed: 'We're not teachers, we're partners in learning … that's the basis of building those relationships, that's how the development and change comes.'

Facilitators posited that it would be unlikely that participants would engage with HS if facilitators performed in a 'teacherly' way. They argued that they were avoiding adultist practices of enforcing a standardised curriculum, instead eliciting their participant's interests and creativity. However, they also tried not to 'come on too strong … [or to seem] like an idiot' (Ruairidh, Facilitator) who was *too keen* to elicit participation. Facilitators were watchful not to let a performed enthusiasm tip into histrionics that might suggest coercion. As the quote from Vinny illustrates, facilitator performances were intended to encourage participants' self-directed creative experiments. Facilitators operationalised an informal pedagogical model that sought to engage their participants 'everyday concerns … [and create] dialogue … between educators and learners' to encourage engagement in creative practices, through which, facilitators and participants developed relationships (Mills and Kraftl 2014, 3–4).

However, this informal pedagogical model was not an 'easy sell'. Participants often came from backgrounds marked by multiple indicators of deprivation. Some – as suggested by Rhona, a teacher working closely with HS participants at Brae High (and whose youth was similarly marked by deprivation) – had inherited a distrust of formal schooling from their parents, who had similarly deprived upbringings and felt that school had only compounded their strife. As a result, participants

exercised an agency that is common to marginalised groups: evaluating whether 'benevolent authorities' are worth engaging (valentine 2011). Facilitators acknowledged this agency and endeavoured to forge relationships that appealed to participants. They related to participants at the 'human scale', attempting to reconfigure relationships around intimacy rather than obedience. As Ruairidh's quote indicates, 'that's the basis'; facilitators felt that there would be no learning if they did not offer a *different kind* of relationship to those that participants had experienced in previous encounters with pedagogues. This alternative mode of relating was performed by facilitators by responding to the changing needs of participants, balancing enthusiasm and easygoingness.

A pertinent example of this ethic was apparent during a focus group with participants at Brae High. Ruairidh (Facilitator) persuaded the group – who usually shared sparingly – to talk about the project by being 'unteacherly'. He joked with participants, rocked on his chair, and threw balled-up tissues. Ailsa (Teacher, Steall Grammar) observed HS's 'unteacherly' approach helping participants who were normally suspicious of adults to, ' … feel safe … it's nonjudgmental'. This was evidenced in interviews with participants, who frequently articulated that facilitators were 'sound'.[4]

Participants found their human scale relationships with facilitators more enjoyable than their relationships with schoolteachers. However, a quote from Magnus (Participant, Steall Grammar) illustrates both the agency and uncertainty of participants' relationships with facilitators, which – as we unpack below – illustrates a cleavage along which adultism could be reasserted. Magnus stated:

> … even if you're a rubbish singer … [y]ou're not scared to say anything. You can say the most random things and you still feel like someone understands … [T]hey don't automatically try and comfort you … you don't realise they're helping you until you realise they're helping you.

Firstly, Magnus' quote highlights the informality of HS. In contrast to formal pedagogies of prescribing curricula and evaluating understanding (Bettencourt 2020), HS encouraged participants to express themselves experimentally and refrained from judging these experiments. If the aim of resisting adultism is to increase children's interdependence-with rather than dependence-on adults (Mills 2016), this space of experimental performance was somewhat successful in this regard. For example, Aidan (Participant, Imir Project), wrote some lyrics but was reticent about performing them. Eventually, he grabbed a mask from HS's art supply box and cut off the part covering his mouth, enabling him to use a microphone. Telling Innes (Facilitator) that he was ready to record, he donned the mask, and – in Ruairidh's (Facilitator) words – 'smashed out' a rap. According to Ruairidh, by literally 'wearing' a new identity via his masked performance, Aidan transitioned from a quiet outsider to an effervescent rapper. Aidan stated that this experience of performance had given him a new sense of interdependence; HS made him feel needed and supported.

Secondly, however, Magnus' quote highlights how adultist norms could be reasserted through HS's facilitation of performance ('you don't realise they're helping you until you realise they're helping you'). HS's community music approach generated trust between participants and facilitators. However, facilitators' performance of easygoingness was at odds with a need to accommodate time and space to address the potential outcomes – both positive and negative – of the vulnerable, trusting environment they were creating, and the responsibilities that this might require of participants. By refraining from negotiating responsibilities with participants, facilitators resisted adultism by allowing participants to have intergenerational human scale relationships. But by negating a collective discussion about the responsibilities required to create a space in which it is safe to be vulnerable, adultism was reasserted.

An example of this reassertion, was when participants aggravated each other's vulnerabilities. In one instance, Yvonne heard Douglas' (Participants, Brae High), lyrics and mocked him about the relationship difficulties they revealed. This sparked a slew of abusive language between the two, and so Isla (Facilitator) intervened, suggesting that they go into separate rooms whilst she brokered a reconciliation. As such, the space was no longer one of performance and mutual appreciation.

An adult had asserted authority, policed norms, and redesignated participants, not as valued performers, but subjects of discipline.

Although the abuse that Yvonne and Douglas directed at one another was inexcusable and there are ways in which we could critically assess facilitators' 'best-practice' in convening and responding to the performance space, what feels more important here is the sense that we have that it would be unfair to both participants and facilitators to analytically centre best practice or children's resistive agency. For reasons we have already explored, participants often found it difficult to trust *any* adult, especially those associated with the education system. Many of HS's facilitators said that it often took the length of a nine-week course, to build trust with many – if not most – participants. They wanted to form longer-term relationships with participants, but this was prevented by the 'deliverables' that they needed to demonstrate to SIF by reaching one hundred participants between April 2019 and March 2020 to secure further funding.

Therefore, it feels more appropriate to understand the resumption of adultist relations as a 'default setting' rather than a failure of facilitators' best practice or a refusal of participants to engage intergenerational relationships constructively. Interdependence was difficult to build between facilitators and participants (and between participants themselves) because participants had been exposed to an adultist regime of being repeatedly framed-as and shamed-for being dependents, whether at school or elsewhere (Gulczyńska 2019). How are participants meant to engage in a mutual discussion about ethics with those they perhaps resent for shaming them as dependents? How can intergenerational trust be worked towards when funding deliverables fail to consider the length of time needed to develop this trust? This generates questions regarding to what extent human scale relationships are an effective method for building intergenerational interdependence. Are 'intimate' and 'meaningful' interactions useful unless they are afforded the time and space needed to undermine 'dependent' identities? Adultism shapes the mindsets not only of the adults it privileges but the children it oppresses. Years of identity construction as dependents meant that participants brought an adultist cleavage into HS spaces via their subjectivities, which was maintained through policy that failed to make the necessary allowances for the creation of intergenerationally interdependent cultures. As such, adultism was structurally reproduced through HS' practice, connecting policy environments and children's subjectivities. This analysis is not put forward as an attempt to denigrate the ways in which human scale relationships made meaningful changes in individuals – such as Aidan's – lives. However, expectations of positive change need to be couched in an appreciation of adultism's proliferative scalarity, which – as we have evidenced here – is reassertive, even through supposed 'best practice'.

In-group interdependence

Dickens and Lonie's (2013) work on community music includes reflection upon Dillon (2010), who argues that community music not only develops intergenerational human scale relationships, but that these relationships increase young people's self-awareness and ability to identify their needs. Developing these knowledges enables marginalised young people to more effectively navigate mainstream services and settings, particularly a variety of secondary, further, and alternative forms of education that they previously found intimidating. This illustrates a proliferative spatial imagination, where human scale work begins to transform the relationships around and between individuals.

In this section, we examine how HS facilitators help participants to develop a proliferative spatial imagination, combatting adultism by developing networks of interdependence through common understandings of deprivation and creating navigational strategies. We argue that this generates a more robust response to adultism than human scale relationships can on their own. However, we illustrate that, due – again – to the adultist policy environment of HS's misaligned 'deliverables', failure of participants to engage in building common understandings and strategies could prompt

HS facilitators to reassert adultism, responsibilising participants for their education and employability.

Engaging participants in their own creative process often took place between a facilitator and participant in a room separate from other participants, utilising the versatile materialities of HS's electronic music equipment to pique participants' creativity and build intergenerational relationships (Askins and Pain 2011). However, opportunities for collective engagement in creative processes and dialogue arose when participants and facilitators used shared spaces for creative collaboration. Facilitators might suggest to a participant that they sing some lyrics over another person's composition, creating dialogue about how a track should sound. Other times, participants would be reticent to create in communal spaces, which would draw participants and facilitators together to discuss the creative or emotional impasse that had arisen.

These discussions could be given space and time due to the community music model HS were using; prioritising the transformation of the artists and their relationships rather than musical proficiency (Higgins and Willingham 2017). A significant theme of these discussions was proliferating the spatial imaginaries of emotional and social learnings that had been developed through human scale relationships between participants and facilitators. In group discussions about creative impasses, learnings developed through human scale relationships were addressed (e.g. greater confidence in identifying emotions). However, these learnings were now being applied in a context of developing a solution to a collective problem, precipitating reflection upon common social or emotional difficulties. These discussions enabled knowledge to be shared within the group of facilitators and participants and for power dynamics within and beyond the group to be reflected upon, tackling the adultist frame of adults as 'educators' in the process (Bettencourt 2020).

A pronounced instance of this kind of discussion occurred during a focus group at Brae High. The group of participants talked about the mental health learnings they had developed through HS and the different techniques and places through which this knowledge could be applied. Craig (Participant) described situations in which he struggled to control his anger and the coping mechanisms he had developed through HS. Other participants shared similar experiences to Craig's, whilst acknowledging the different places and relationships through which they were addressing negative emotions and mental ill-health. As such, a reticulating imaginary 'map' of negative emotions and mental ill-health was generated, allowing new solutions to be developed to address common emotional and mental issues that arose across space; in the home, in 'hostile' neighbourhoods, and at school. This willingness to participate in collective discussion illustrated not just a proliferation of relational transformations from human scale relationships to local geographies of mental health, but to a geography of in-group interdependence. As Danni (Participant, Brae High) stated, this interdependence was the most important part of HS for her. When asked what the group might do other than make music, Danni answered that it did not matter because, 'it'd still be good, because we're together'.

Another way in which HS proliferated interdependence beyond the human scale was through Ruairidh (Facilitator) sharing his life story with participants. Ruairidh stated that if participants were struggling to engage with HS, he would talk about his own difficult experiences of school, deprivation, and how he had altered the geography of his relationships to create positive pathways for his future. Ruairidh talked about areas of his life with which he was previously unhappy and how he had addressed those; repairing family relationships, distancing himself from friends who encouraged his addictions, and getting psychotherapy. He couched this in terms of human scale relationships – with his partner and her family, for instance – which catalysed these proliferating relational shifts. Ruairidh argued that these relationships helped him make better decisions about where interdependences could/not be built and to have the confidence that when he experienced setbacks in proliferating a more interdependent geography around himself, this did not mean that the whole endeavour had failed. Furthermore, he could engage encounters that inhibited interdependence with a degree of savvy, leaning on more supportive relationships to mitigate these ambivalent contexts.

These imaginaries of proliferating interdependence often prompted participants to reflect upon their relationship with formal education, something HS facilitated and guided. Ruairidh (Facilitator) stated:

> I think [what] … needs to be pointed out to [participants is] … there is always a way to engage with any kind of institution. If there's a game, there's always a way to play it … But how can they play it and be more … adaptive … ? To accept … what's actually there …

Ruairidh's concern that participants would be 'adaptive' was driven by the hope that, despite participants' difficulties in developing interdependence with adults (particularly teachers), they might find ways to engage adults and institutions that they felt ambivalent about if it might serve a broader network of interdependence. This reflects the mission statement on HS's website that states that they are 'building pathways to further education providers, so that young people can progress their learning … '. HS facilitators could be quite directive regarding this. For instance, Fiona (Participant, Steall Grammar) told HS facilitators that she was struggling with a college course that was part of her 'bespoke' school timetable. She said that because she was enjoying HS, she would leave that course and switch to music technology, assuming it would be similar to HS. In the process of addressing the emotional difficulties that her college course raised, HS facilitators reminded Fiona why she had chosen her original course. As a result, Fiona recommitted to her previous plan.

Fiona's story *could* be assessed unfavourably. It might plausibly be perceived as a reemergence of the adultist trope that success in formal education is the ideal that everyone should aspire to (Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). However, Lonie and Dickens (2016) work on community music has highlighted that often what is more important for young people's learning identities is a pedagogical culture that responds to their context, affording them access to a variety of pedagogies to discern what suits them. They argue that the quality of relationships and appropriate learning processes are more important for developing learning identities than setting aside and equipping particular times and spaces. HS manifests key notions in contemporary geographies of education; broadening learning beyond academic knowledge and stressing non-linear and multi-site development of learning identities (Kraftl et al. 2021). But this *folds-in* an acknowledgement of the *benefits* of more formal education. HS facilitators understood their practice as a way of reconnecting participants to opportunities – including formal education – rather than embodying a particular pedagogical approach. This parallels Dickens and Lonie's arguments about community music that frames it as an 'opportunity space' (2013, 69), where young people are equipped to assume control over their learning identities. Although HS reframed learning beyond academic interests, HS facilitators were enthusiastic about maintaining links with formal education. As Isla (Facilitator) stated: '[participants] were saying, "We wish that this was a class every week. Why can you not be our teacher every week for a certain class?". And then you're like, "That's probably what should happen … "'

However, enthusiasm to generate opportunities for participants and help them to become 'adaptive' in navigating pedagogical contexts and co-creating networks of interdependence, created opportunities for adultism to be reasserted. HS facilitators could get frustrated with participants that did not engage. Vinny (Facilitator) was observed talking to a participant who had refused to participate in any creative practices saying, 'Well you can't just sit there and do nothing!'. There was tension – between creating a more interdependent 'opportunity space' for participants and – once again – evidencing outcomes to SIF. Although HS managed to create a more interdependent culture between facilitators and participants, the pressure that facilitators were under to evidence this transformation meant that an individualising, neoliberal, narrative of responsibilisation could be foisted back onto participants. At points, HS's efforts to help participants develop adaptive learning identities shifted from a collective project of problem-solving to a practice of disciplining participants into neoliberal subject indexes of flexibility and resilience.

Although we could be critical of HS's practice here by foregrounding the highly charged concept of 'adaptability', it again feels more important to stress the significant pressure facilitators were under to achieve SIF deliverables. Facilitators, because of the limited time they had with participants

– which, as aforementioned, is a failing of policy to make the necessary allowances of time and space for the creation of intergenerationally interdependent cultures – were anxious that participants made the most of HS's 'opportunity space'. Inability to contain this anxiety, intensified by their personal memories of childhoods marked by deprivation and adultism, lead to frustrated shifting of responsibility onto participants for the project's outcomes. However, this proliferative encircling of the project by adultist policy which reasserted itself through the anxieties of facilitators, was meeting tougher resistance in the collective agency of participants. Several teachers interviewed by COOL Music researchers reported participants supporting each other to deescalate encounters with teachers that might previously have become volatile, resulting in participants being suspended or expelled from school. Proliferative, reticulated chains of interdependence were developing among participants as they began to see themselves less as dependents and more as autonomous actors in charge of their learning identities. They reacted negatively to adults less frequently, navigating savvily around the adultism that encircled them. They met certain behavioural expectations, maintaining access to school, and so protected their access to HS's 'opportunity space'. Although participants' interdependence with HS facilitators was compromised by an adultist cleavage running through HS's accountability to policy deliverables and haunting of facilitators by their own difficult childhoods, participants' interdependence amongst themselves began to act as a defense against reassertive adultism.

Reframing learning

Work on the 'new geography of education' (Lonie and Dickens, 2016, 89) has significantly critiqued 'mainstream assumptions about learning … [enabling geographers to] better apprehend how learning is practiced [and] idealised' (Kraftl 2013, 438). However, there has been little analysis of how different frames of learning may run adultist cleavages through attempts to generate intergenerational interdependence. Singular frames of 'what learning is really about' are often put forward as models of best practice designed to oppose and neutralise adultism, rather than developing an understanding of adultism as a proliferative structure that must be resisted contextually. Although Lonie and Dickens' (2016) work (and that of many others (Kraftl 2015; Mills 2016)) has illustrated how children and adults generate fluid cultures of learning between different kinds of pedagogical spaces, these authors also propose that there is little recognition or encouragement of such fluidity at the level of governance. Additionally, our sense is that although 'new' geographies of education understand learning as contingent upon a variety of spaces, times, processes, and people; *unevenness of access* to a variety of learning spaces still needs to be foregrounded.

In this section, we examine the different ways in which HS participants, facilitators, and various agents that HS partnered with frame learning, and how these groups – but particularly HS facilitators – alter this framing depending on the context in which learning is being addressed. We underscore Lonie and Dickens' (2016) point that despite negative learning experiences earlier in life, learning itself is not identified as an issue by marginalised young people, rather, the people and processes involved in it. Furthermore, we argue that HS facilitators' understanding of the structural and scalar nature of adultism plays a crucial role in their advocation for participants, building more extensive proliferations of intergenerational interdependence and increasing access to learning times and spaces. As such, we illustrate that although access-to an autonomy-over a variety of pedagogical spaces is important for understanding and encouraging the development of learning identities, understanding adultism's proliferative scalarity and its intensification by other forms of domination is key to grasping the limits of a fluid understanding of learning. A fluid counter-proliferation of intergenerational interdependence must include *increased space and time* in which to learn.

In line with 'new' geographies of education, HS facilitators had a capacious definition of learning, the processes for which should be tailored to the context of the learner:

Ruairidh (Facilitator): … [participants] have learned to produce this music … [but] if they can take away skills that they have learned and [transfer] them into aspects of their lives, such as speaking to someone … in an interview … or having the courage to say, 'I am having this or that issue', then that is a massive … learning outcome … it's all … [about] alternative learning … and then building all the other education frameworks in about it. At the end of it, if they haven't got qualifications, if they haven't got this [or] that … they've learned transferable life skills …

In addition to the kind of learning that Ruairidh's quote indicates, facilitators considered self-worth, identification of needs, and assertiveness to be valid learnings, equal to musicality. Facilitators and participants considered these practical and emotional learnings to be more relevant to many participants' lives. As HS's website claims, one of their main goals is to make 'learning work for vulnerable, disadvantaged and disengaged young people'. However, when interacting with participants, facilitators avoided framing HS as a learning environment. Facilitators argued that if they framed the project as learning, particularly at the beginning of a course, participant engagement would be harder to elicit. This made sense when interviewing Aidan (Participant, Imir Project): '[Teachers] … only care about learning, but not really anything else for students.'

Aidan's quote captures the sentiment that many HS participants shared; that 'prioritising learning' is an excuse that adults give in order to scapegoat children who are failed by formal education. However, some participants were happy to frame their engagement with HS as learning.

Interviewer: … so say you could totally change school and how it's done, right, what would you have … [Y]ou would have [HS], what else … ? // Seòras (Participant, Imir Project): A different way of learning.

Ross (Participant, Steall Grammar): I feel like I want to come back next week and … learn more.

There was a tension, then, between facilitators' perception of how participants framed learning and how they *actually* framed learning. As the quotes from Seòras and Ross illustrate, certain participants were not opposed to learning, but rather its form, and found learning – in an altered form – desirable. However, it was clear that 'learning' was a loaded term for many participants – like Aidan – and so HS facilitators were cautious, evading talk of learning unless participants brought it up. This is one way in which embracing the fluidity around definitions of learning offers up radical potential (Kraftl et al. 2021). HS facilitators did not have to call what they were doing learning for participants' learning identities to develop. HS facilitators and participants were able to resist adultism by refusing its language. Although the structural reassertions of adultism discussed in the previous two sections were present in the midst of this expression of best practice, it proved a relatively successful strategy in terms of developing participants' learning identities. Despite facilitators' 'slowly-slowly' approach – informed by their keen awareness of longstanding associations between learning and adultism – many participants began experimenting with a wider range of learning practices. For instance, Rhona (Teacher, Brae High) walked past a classroom one day to see a group of five HS participants silently writing. Later, she pulled Ruairidh (Facilitator) aside and asked him 'How the hell have you managed that?'

However, another key context in which facilitators reframed learning was when advocating for their participants. Facilitators worked closely with other parties engaging their participants, garnering information so they could relate to participants more effectively. However, they also used these relationships to push back against adultist ideas circulating in the educational culture around their participants. When engaging with social workers, teachers, and SIF, facilitators told stories about participants that foregrounded their pursuit of learning. HS convened meetings, bringing many of the parties engaging a group of participants together to generate new understandings of participants' learning processes. Facilitators resisted attempts to rush participants back to school due to their 'improved behaviour' with HS, instead co-ordinating the multiple agents involved in participants' lives to generate more conducive contexts for developing their learning identities. HS's more interdependent culture of learning bled into wider contexts around participants – parents, teachers, social workers, police – confronting the adultism within them and reframing learning as dependent

upon a context in which learners can explore their needs and interests rather than conforming to a standardised trajectory (Kraftl 2015).

HS facilitators understood their advocation for their participants explicitly in terms of proliferating anti-adultist chains of interdependence, and understood *policy* as the key vector of adultism's proliferation that they should target to clear blockages on participants' learning identities.

> Ruairidh (Facilitator): I just hope that [HS] shows there are different ways to engagement … there are bigger changes that need to be made [in education]. [HS] is all about creating huge change in policy … and … holding [our stories] to the face of the government … there's not going to be any real change until we change the environment the young people are in …

Whether HS's advocacy will alter the State's approach to education is an open question. Adultism's deeply ingrained position alongside educational policy and neoliberal ideology certainly engenders pessimism regarding this strategy. However, HS facilitators' understanding of adultism as a highly proliferated structure is a helpful starting point – for pedagogues and children's geographies – in terms of understanding adultism and the multiple ways it can reassert itself, as well as the scalar approach needed to combat it. HS illustrated their grasp of this scalar framing of adultism in their strategy going forward. They wanted to push-back against State educational policy through advocacy, but they also had a plan for proliferation of more intergenerationally interdependent cultures around or beyond it. By engaging with the broader social networks around participants and working to develop different understandings about learning within them, HS were starting to create, if not a more proliferative landscape of intergenerational interdependence, certainly a proliferated reframing of learning: of where and how it could be done. For example, HS facilitators worked in particularly close partnership with teachers that advocated for and facilitated 'bespoke timetables' for HS participants. These timetables meant that young people who struggled with school could still attend some classes and then spend the rest of their time in further and alternative forms of education such as HS or college courses. The point for HS facilitators was not just that they were helping participants to navigate their current context through increased interdependence but creating a broader network of *times and spaces* through which new kinds of relationships could enable new learning identities to unfurl.

Conclusion

We began this paper by arguing that children's geographies and geographies of education needed to recover a sense of adultism as having a structural and scalar spatiality. We argued that it is a structure of social relations that prevents children from mutual interdependency within their social sphere, reasserting its influence in lock-step with other structures of domination. In this paper we have developed new understandings of how adultism is structured, emphasising its proliferative, hegemonic spatiality which encircles and traverses sites of resistance. However, we have also illustrated how anti-adultist proliferations might be generated, suggesting that to do so requires understanding the limitations of adults' best-practice, children's agency, and fluid models of learning.

Through our case study, we addressed three ways in which facilitators and participants tried to create more interdependent cultures through performance, in-group interdependence, and reframing learning. For each of these practices, we illustrated how adultism's proliferative scalarity could create cleavages in nascent spaces of interdependence. Counter to these trajectories, we also illustrated that increasingly robust cultures of resistance to adultism could be developed through increasing the scalarity of more intergenerationally interdependent cultures. Expanding upon work by Barajas (2022) and Wall (2019) on the logical failings of adultism, we have developed a scalar and spatial understanding of how adultism reproduces itself and highlighted new matters of urgency in the analysis of children's geographies and geographies of education. Educational policy is of particular significance here: when policy is inattentive to the adultist cleavages that we have disclosed, and to the pressing need for more spaces and times where intergenerationally interdependent cultures can form, adultism is normalised and proliferates.

Furthermore, we illustrated that scholarship highlighting adults' best practice and enlargement of children's agency – although important for understanding what might be possible for adults and children to achieve together – should preferably be couched in an alertness to the wider socio-economic conditions in which interdependence is being advocated and (imperfectly) enacted. Both facilitators and participants in our case study – although 'messing-up' in various ways – tried hard to forge intergenerationally interdependent cultures, but were limited by a lack of space and time spent together, which was largely dictated by SIF's policy deliverables. Although the combination of facilitators' best practice and children's agency can create moments of hopeful change that should not be discounted – Aidan's transformation through his rap performance, for instance – geographers of children and education should be wary of using moments like this to frame the 'silver bullet' for adultism. This is one of the shortcomings of what Lonie and Dickens (2016) say about how young people 'become musicians' by taking charge of their learning identities and patching them together from experimentation with different spaces and times. Firstly, some young people struggle to take charge of their learning identity – because they have been so thoroughly interpolated as 'dependents' often even beyond their identity as children, taking into consideration, for instance, where they are from – and secondly, not all young people have access to the range of spaces and time necessary for this patchwork construction of learning identity. There is a structural and spatial issue here that geographies of education must take into consideration.

This previous point is instructive for children's geographies and geographies of education in terms of their engagement with other disciplines interested in pedagogy. Community music literature, for example, often presents its critiques and framings of 'best practice' as solutions for adultism without taking into consideration the wider socio-economic and political context in which these practices are situated. Success in one context does not necessarily create a template for success in another and does not formulate a plan for uprooting adultism from wider systems of governance. Children's geographies and geographies of education should theorise in conversation with other disciplines such as critical pedagogy (Steinberg and Brown 2020; Rollo et al. 2020) or literatures around youth participatory action research (Bettencourt 2020; Douthirt-Cohen and Tokunaga 2020), but the alluringly hopeful claims that they often make regarding best practice should always be subjected to critical inspection.

We have also applauded the interest shown by critical geographies of education in reframing learning as something that can be shaped by learners' mobility across content and process. In our final empirical section, we illustrated how extending this knowledge into the pedagogical cultures around children can create environments that are more conducive to developing their learning identities. However, the claim here that the people and processes involved in education are more important than time and space needs to be tempered. Without time and space in which to experiment, there can be no experimenting. This is why HS were so keen to spend more time with participants and to create different kinds of spaces in which to interact. Again, a keen alertness to the proliferation of adultism and the ways in which it is made manifest draws critical attention, not just to poor adult–child ethics, but to both the lack of appropriate spaces wherein children can develop their learning identities and the shaming of exactly those children who need such spaces the most.

Finally, we have also illustrated the need for children's geographies and geographies of education to study more extensively proliferated cultures of intergenerational (and intragenerational) interdependence. Participants were less affected by adultism when they were more interdependent. They shared knowledge about navigating negative emotions and helped each other to deescalate confrontations with teachers to protect their access to the opportunity space of HS. Furthermore, HS facilitators' deep understanding of their own and their participants' positions drove them to address policy-makers, to disseminate knowledge about different ways and places of learning amongst the adults around participants, and to appropriate further spaces and times in which participants could develop their learning identities. HS facilitators were trying to create a counter-proliferation of learning cultures that routed around and back against the proliferative scalarity of adultism. Arguably, critical geographical studies of children and education should be emboldened to do the same.

Notes

1. Community music is a music-making form of participatory art that prioritises outcomes like improved self-esteem, developing networks of care, and social change over musical proficiency (Higgins and Willingham 2017).
2. https://www.heavysound.org/.
3. https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-innovation-fund-guidance/.
4. Word used in some Scots dialects to mean 'easy to get along with'.

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