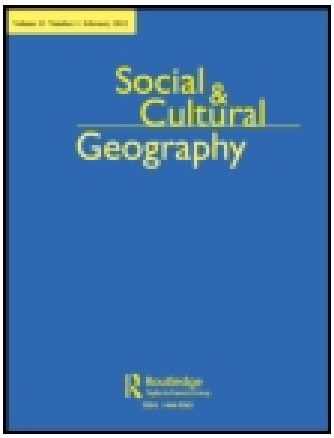

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Multiculture, middle class competencies and friendship practices in super-diverse geographies

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Multiculture, middle class competencies and friendship practices in super-diverse geographies

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In this paper we use a small number of in-depth interviews with parents with primary school children to examine social mixing and friendship practices in two super-diverse North London boroughs. In these complex geographical contexts, characterized by gentrification processes and old and new migrations, we suggest that primary schools are convergent places where adults and children from different backgrounds are likely to meet and interact, and the paper explores the extent to which adults and children, thrown together in and through these sites, negotiate relationships with those who are differently socially and culturally situated to themselves. Informed by the interview narratives, the paper highlights the importance of focusing on the micro, quotidian ways in which differences in social and/or ethnic background shape those relationships and it explores some instances of the ways in which those differences are routinely encountered, managed and/or avoided. In this way the paper contributes theoretical and empirical nuance to current concerns around difference and diversity and the interactions of complex urban populations by 'adding' social class to everyday multiculture perspectives and everyday multiculture perspectives to urban middle class debates.

Key words: multiculture, friendships, social mixing, social difference, urban middle class, primary schools.

Introduction

This paper reports on the preliminary stage of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project exploring adults and children's friendships across class and ethnic difference.[1] Reflecting the interest in the experiential dimensions of multiculture and what Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, and Mohan (2013) have described as the 'convivial turn' in recent work on ethnicity and geography, the project focuses on the formations and practices of adults' and children's friendships in ethnically and socially mixed or 'super-diverse' (Vertovec 2007) urban localities in London. Using primary schools as spaces of routine encounters of difference, we explore whether adults and children seek, avoid, make and maintain friendships with those who are differently socially situated to themselves; how those friendships develop; how differences in social and/or ethnic background shape and affect those relationships; and how competently those differences are routinely negotiated and managed.

Drawing on qualitative data emerging from the early findings of our research, the paper considers the varying extents to which the participants, who live in socially diverse areas, each engaged with those different to themselves, and the extent to which they encouraged their children to do so. As such this paper explores the nature of informal, quotidian negotiations of ethnic diversity alongside the performance of class and the negotiation and maintenance of boundaries and distinctions. Although drawing on a relatively small number of in-depth interviews, our analysis nevertheless makes it possible to reflect on, connect with and inform current diversity debates about everyday multiculture and social mixing (and avoidance) practices in urban environments. In particular we seek to contribute to these debates by focusing on first, the notion of *sustained* encounters of difference, second, the uncertainty of what encounters and mixing deliver and third, on the nature and extent to which parents utilize everyday diversity skills to negotiate their own and their children's friendship relations.

Organized into five broad parts, the paper begins by considering the recent trend in the social sciences (and geography in particular) to focus on everyday, micro encounters in diverse urban localities and consider what these debates tell us about developing multiculture, social cohesion and people's ability to negotiate difference and diversity. Noting the concern in these debates as to knowing what might be 'meaningful' and transformative in day-to-day but often 'superficial' encounters of difference, the second part of the paper turns to questions of personal lives and friendships. The connection between friendships and diversity has received some attention. In particular there has been sociological interest in children's and adolescents' friendships across ethnic difference (see Bruegel 2006; Hewitt 1986, for example), and public interest in friendships across ethnic difference is reflected in its use as an indicative measure of cohesion (see, for example Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009[2]). However, there has been much more limited sociological scrutiny of the diversity of adult friendships and the generational aspects of friendship. Certainly the ways in which adults manage the social and ethnic diversity of their children's friendships and the ways in which adult friendships may be generated through the social worlds of their children are under-researched and the paper sets out why it is important to address these processes and practices. It then provides an overview of the study and the data collected and uses the participants' voices and narratives to examine the ways in which social and ethnic difference is experienced, managed, avoided, engaged with and reflected on by parents in relation to their children's lives and their own. It concludes by thinking through the ways in which these experiential stories of heterogeneity, everyday encounter and social practice might complicate and contribute to current debates about the urban middle classes, super-diversity and everyday multiculture.

The convivial turn: difference and everyday multiculture

There is growing interest in research, policy and political circles in the everyday encounters and social interactions of communities in the increasing number of localities which are marked by significant social and ethnic difference (Amin 2002; Cantle 2001; Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007; Department of Communities and Local Government 2012; Gilroy 2004; Hemming 2011; Kesten, Cochrane, Mohan, and Neal 2011;

Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, and Mohan 2013; Noble 2009, 2010; Putnam 2007; Wilson 2011, 2012; Wise and Velayutham 2009). Whilst very differently inflected, this body of work shares an emphasis on informal social interactions. The academically orientated work in particular has emphasized the need to recognize the everyday or ordinary-ness of multiculture where 'differences are negotiated on the smallest of scales' (Wilson 2011: 635) and often in unpanicked and routine ways (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, and Mohan 2013; Noble 2009). Such small, mundane interactions are seen to be of importance for their potential to offer evidence of quotidian intercultural practices and multicultural competencies. In other words, socially and culturally mixed populations develop what Sennett (2012: 6) has called skilled cooperation to manage, and thrive, in increasingly heterogeneous urban environments. The notion of people possessing competencies, i.e. everyday cultural skills, knowledges and practices that are mobilized and enacted as they live diversity is central to our study.

Arguments about recognizing conviviality and competency work to reposition diverse urban environments from being dystopic, conflictual, segregated landscapes and recognize them as more complex places where difference is routine and regularly, often amicably, negotiated in prosaic interactions and settings. As Hemming (2011: 65) argues, 'the idea of "encounter" has been employed by geographers as a way of thinking through how citizens can learn to live with cultural difference by showing civility to others.' Encounter approaches mark a re-engagement with older ideas of contact theory (Allport 1954) which argued that positive and relatively prolonged interpersonal contact between individuals from different racial groups or ethnicities can lessen prejudice and anxiety. Whilst contact theory fell out of favour in the later decades of the twentieth century, because of its limited recognition of the structural nature of social inequalities, its more recent popularity stems from the room it allows for individual agency and the potential given to individual encounters to be transformative and 'scaled up' from the individual with whom one is in contact to wider populations (Matejskova and Leitner 2011). Another key driver in the returning interest in the old notion of 'contact' is the new concept of 'super-diversity'. Given the increasingly heterogeneous nature of urban environments in England (see Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, and Mohan 2013; Office for National Statistics 2012), but also other national contexts (see Sennett 2012; Wise and Velayutham 2009), the likelihood and possibilities of routine contact and social mixing are high. As Noble (2009: 47) argues in the Australian context, the issue

> wasn't just that people lived hybrid lives, or lived them in poly-ethnic neighbourhoods, but that complexity and its subsequent forms of interaction were of such a nature that they went beyond typical understandings of multiculturalism and corresponded to the claim that diversity was becoming more diverse.

However, there have been concerns about the convivial turn and the extent to which encounters may be meaningful and have the potential to reshape social relations across difference is contested. Valentine (2008) has argued strongly that everyday encounters are often only indicators of socially accepted forms of public civility, and 'urban etiquette does not equate with an ethics of care and mutual respect for difference' (Valentine 2008: 329). Nor do ad hoc encounters, even of a positive nature, necessarily develop any lasting

challenge to embedded prejudices and stereotypes (see also Clayton 2009). As Hemming notes, 'affective micro encounters are still a reflection of wider power relations and they cannot be disconnected from the politics of "race", ethnicity, gender, class and other social divisions' (2011: 65).

The uncertainty about what can be delivered by the focus on encounter has been explored by Askins and Pain (2011) in their work with a mixed group of young people in a community arts project in the north-east of England and by Wilson (2012) in her research exploring the social relations of mixed populations using public transport in the English city of Birmingham. What the research of Askins and Pain (2011) and Wilson (2012) both particularly highlight is first, the precarious and unstable nature of an encounter and second, the importance of materiality in shaping its tone. For example, Askins and Pain argue that the tactile nature of the actual art materials invited interactions and mixing, 'contact with and through objects [...] mediated points of connection and similarity, opening up potential for new social relations to be enacted' (2011: 817). Wilson (2011: 646) also suggests that the intimacies that travelling by public transport demands of heterogeneous populations—bodies closely sharing confined spaces—demands sets of practices and obligations that can produce sometimes conflictual, but also sometimes consensual social relations and even a sense of being part of a 'collective culture' and 'temporary community'.

In this context, we aim to examine the forms and ways in which conviviality and competency are apparent and enacted in super-diverse geographies. In particular we are interested in the longevity of an encounter and the ways in which encounters may develop into more sustained social relationships. In this way we use friendship as a specific measure of on-going, affective encounter (see below) and we use primary schools (and their related surrounds—homes, parks, streets, cafes, libraries, leisure centres, etc.) as the routine spaces in which encounters of difference are likely to take place.

Unlike the more temporal sites of the community art project discussed by Askins and Pain and the populations of Wilson's bus journeys, primary schools in socially and ethnically mixed localities are sites in which adults and children are brought together in regular contact. As Wilson's own research on a primary school notes, 'primary schools are part of parents' daily routine for seven years or longer' (2012: 261) and exploring children and adults' friendships focused on the school site present the possibility of moving beyond 'one-off' encounters between heterogeneous populations. The primary school world, its various events and its routines, the rhythm of a school day and the length of a school term and year, all create an environment in which there is a regularity of contact, a shared experience and a sharing of a social resource (i.e. the school). This creates extensive and on-going 'exposure' to difference and possibilities of mixing and interaction.

It is the concept of friendship and its social and spatial dimensions that we now consider.

Why friendships matter sociologically and geographically

In the UK context, there have been various sociological investigations of friendship relations. There is a relatively well-established focus on children and young people's friendships and what social and ethnic difference means in terms of formations of interpersonal relationships (e.g. Back 1996; Bruegel

2006; George 2007; Hewitt 1986; Hollingworth and Mansaray 2012; Jones 1988; Reay 2007; Troyna and Hatcher 1992). Roger Hewitt focused specifically on adolescent inter-ethnic friendships on a social housing estate in south London, examining how racism and cultural difference was continually negotiated and manipulated by the teenage participants through invariably complicated practices, with attention also being paid to their parents' stated opinions on particular friendships. Bruegel (2006), studying friendships in primary schools, concludes that these can and do cross ethnic divides, when children are in multi-ethnic schools (40 per cent of the 1250 Year 6 children surveyed had inter-ethnic friendships). Bruegel argues that it is the sharing of daily routines that leads to such relationships, rather than more artificial initiatives such as twinning schools. Her report concludes by noting that some parents in the study became more positive about those of different backgrounds as a result of their children's friendships, and she agrees with Putnam that 'more communal schools' (Putnam 2000) can foster 'civic re-engagement'. Bruegel's later work (Weller and Bruegel 2009) also emphasizes the role children play in the generation of neighbourhood social capital, directly through their own local relationships, and indirectly, as parents come to form new networks around their children (also Bryne 2006).

Adult friendship experiences and the changing roles and forms of friendships in personal lives and contemporary social relations have been the focus of the work of such scholars as Roseneil (2000), Pahl (2000), Spencer and Pahl (2006), Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005), Savage et al. (2013) and Smart, Davies, Heaphy, and Mason (2010). This body of work engages with gender and sometimes with social class. For example, Spencer and Pahl note from their research that diverse 'personal communities' (i.e. friendship networks) do exist across class and ethnic differences (2006: 89) and in their study of localities, globalizations and processes of belonging, Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005) demonstrate the relevance of spatial and social stratifications in considerations of adult friendship practices. More recently, in their Bourdieusian redefinition of class categories in the UK, Savage et al. (2013) have included friendship networks as an aspect of the social capital that may shape people's class location. However, it remains unusual to find a sustained focus on the processes and spaces of social and ethnic mixing in the study of adult friendships. The concern in our study to explore the ways in which mixed friendships may develop in socially and ethnically heterogeneous urban geographies has led us to the argument made by urban geographers and others that socially mixed environments do not necessarily deliver social *mixing* (see, Butler and Lees 2006; Butler and Robson 2003; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011, for example).

As we suggest earlier, local schools are a site of potential mixing, but even in the school context, these mixing opportunities may be directly and indirectly contained and avoided—particularly at secondary school stage—by a series of parental and peer strategies and practices (Bryne 2006; Butler and Hamnett 2011; Hollingworth and Mansaray 2012; Reay 2007; Vincent and Ball 2006). Reay and her colleagues argue that teenagers from different social backgrounds are often separated at school, partly through school systems (e.g. setting) or through their own patterns of identification or disidentification. Some middle class parents who claim to value socially mixed schools search for the 'right kind' of mix, that is a mix of ethnicities in which no one group dominates. The least

valued in the urban middle class search for this right kind of mix are (working class) families understood as not having a pro-school orientation (Ball, Rollock, Vincent, and Gillborn 2011; Bryne 2006).

Class separation in socially diverse urban localities is often complicated because whilst gentrification processes deliver heterogeneous local populations, such localities may be characterized by entrenched polarizations in which there are few sites of encounter and interaction—a process which has been described as a form of 'social tectonics', whereby social groups or 'plates' overlap or run parallel to one another without much in the way of integrated experience in the area's social and cultural institutions (Robson and Butler 2001: 77). Similarly, Atkinson and Bridge (2005) have highlighted the processes of 'class colonisation' whereby gentrification creates neighbourhoods in which gentrifiers seek a sense of sanctuary with 'people like us'. This separation process includes middle class families using and encouraging a 'critical mass' of others to use the local primary school (Butler and Robson 2003). Such research reveals the extent to which social class drives (and is defined by) such practices and anxieties within socially mixed geographies.

However, it is also possible to identify nuances within the social tectonics argument. For example, Reay et al. suggest that there *is* mixing at primary school, and, even at secondary level, they argue that 'it remains the case that there are important democratic and communitarian possibilities of comprehensive schooling where children of different class and ethnic cultures may actually mix and become friends' (Reay, Crozier, and James 2011: 160). The emergence of a black and minority ethnic (BME) urban middle class (see Archer 2011; Moore 2008; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, and Gillborn 2011) may also disrupt the extent of ethnic if not social polarizations within mixed urban environments. It is in this context that we draw on the stories of the participants in our study to examine urban middle class experiences and practices of mixing, withdrawal, management and competencies for living in super-diverse localities.

The study

In his examination of the new class relations of village life, Heley (2011: 219) argues that 'backyard ethnography', i.e. the examination of the social world in which the researcher is local and with which she is 'already familiar [...] can offer valuable insights into [local] cultures by facilitating particular forms of disclosure and understanding.' There was very much a backyard ethnographic (see also Wolcott 2008) sensibility in our research approach. We are familiar with the super-diverse geographies of both north London boroughs of Hackney and Islington, in which this preliminary study was located. We chose both of these boroughs, which border each other, because of their particularly high levels of diversity (Office for National Statistics 2012). In Hackney just under half (49.9 per cent) and in Islington just under a quarter (24.7 per cent) of the populations are of BME origin. This ethnic mix delivers significant religious and linguistic diversity with Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths being represented (see http://www.hackney.gov.uk; http://www.islington.gov.uk). The social mix is similarly complicated due to the impact of gentrification and pockets of super-gentrification which means that social and economic, rather than ethnic, polarization is an issue of policy concern (see above discussion especially Butler and Lees 2006; Hackney Community Cohesion Review 2010).

Table 1 Participant profiles

Participant	Occupation	Partner's occupation	Ethnic self-identification
Anna	Solicitor but on career break to look after the children	Architect	White English
Abigail	Textile designer	Film maker	White English
Anthea	Economist working for third sector organization	Teacher	White English
Emily	Actor and photographer	Solicitor	White English
Jeanne	Actor	Film maker	Mixed English-Ghanaian
Carla	Journalist	Lone parent	Mixed English-Iranian

In addition to our geographic embeddedness, we both had various linkages and connections to the participants' children and/or to the schools they attended. Through our knowledge of the localities, through our existing social networks and by using snowballing techniques, we selected six participants for the preliminary study and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with them. This selection process was based on such factors as participants' length of residency in the boroughs, their informal involvement in the social world of the primary schools their children attended, their biographies and their openness to social diversity. As the details in Table 1 show, our participants were by no means a representative sample of the local communities nor were they intended to be, as our aim was to identify broad themes that would justify further consideration. All were women. Again this was not an intentional bias but more a reflection of the predominant trend for mothers to be responsible for the home–school relationship (Vincent and Ball 2006). All the participants were middle class (as defined by their occupations which put them into professional/managerial jobs in National Statistics Socio-economic Classification classes 1 and 2), and ready to describe themselves in this way. Again this was not intentional but reflects both the complex social and spatial locations of the study and the ethnographic design of the fieldwork. All six participants had lived in the localities for over five years and often much longer. Whilst the geographical background, gender and class positions of the six participants were homogeneous, their ethnic identification was more diverse. Two participants defined themselves as mixed heritage and four as white English. These details are summarized above.

The preliminary study focused on three primary schools in two boroughs; Milton School in Hackney, and Canning School and Treetop School in Islington. These schools were selected for the characteristics that they all shared, as well as for the differences between them. All three schools are located in areas which have experienced significant levels of (old and new) migration and each school has a higher than national average proportion of pupils for who English is an additional language. All three schools are located in socially mixed areas in which gentrification processes are established. However, the extent of the socio-economic mix is broadly reflected in the differences between the schools in the number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals (FSM). Table 2 provides summary information of each of these characteristics.

Milton School is a small, Victorian build, popular school, located close to an area of established gentrification within Hackney, which we have called Lowfields. Canning School is another Victorian build school set within a

Table 2 School profiles

School	Location and description	Size	Ofsted description
Milton	Hackney	Total school population, 240	'Good': 2012 'Nearly three times more pupils than average speak English as an additional language'. Fewer than average pupils on FSM (national average is approximately 17%, 2011 figures).
Canning	Islington	Total school population, 229	'Outstanding': 2011 'The school population is diverse', 'The proportion of pupils eligible for FSM is well above the national average. A very high proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and almost half the pupils speak English as an additional language.'
Treetop	Islington	Total population, 338	'Good' 2012 'More than two-thirds of the pupils come from minority ethnic communities. Most of these speak English as an additional language.' Pupils claiming FSM is 'well above' national average.

rapidly but more recently and, as yet still only partially, gentrified area of Islington, and is also a small primary school. It has less of a following amongst the local middle classes, who have traditionally preferred a nearby church school, although this is changing as the respondents note. Canning received an Outstanding in its recent 2011 Ofsted inspection and this, along with the schools' Standardized Attainment Tests results, was seen by our participants as prompting the rise in middle class pupils in the school. Treetop is in a post war building, and is larger than both Canning and Milton. It is located in a residential area of Islington close to two social housing estates, but also partially surrounded by large, elegant, owner-occupied houses. In recent years, the school has become more popular with local middle class residents, because it was seen to have a dynamic head and an emphasis on extended day activities. Our respondent from Treetop School, Anthea, felt that the school, with its emphasis on art, music and after-school activities, 'offered a middle class education to working class children'.

The interviews took varying amounts of time. The shortest was one hour and the longest over two hours. The interviews all took place either in the participants' own homes or in local cafes chosen by the participants. With the latter the interviews would often be interrupted as friends and other mothers from the school stopped to chat and catch up. This extra discursive experience of disrupted interviews and introductions and day-to-day conversation again reflected the very situated nature of the participants within their local and school worlds. The interviews were all recorded, fully transcribed and then analysed in relation to such themes as children's friendships, schools, localities, mixing, multiculture, social difference, enjoyments, anxieties, difficulties and so on.

Obviously this form of study has no 'statistical power' but the six interview narratives do present a set of in-depth, 'vertical' descriptions and intimate accounts of the ways in which social difference is lived. They contain patterns and trends as well as

inconsistencies and discrepancies that can be used to inform and help reflect on current debates about social life, multicultural competency, and middle class friendship and parenting practices in diverse urban locations.

Living difference ambivalently: the desire for difference

Bauman (2003) has argued that perceptions of difference in urban environments by the residents of cities can be described in terms of mixophobia or mixophilia. In our interviews mixophilia was a particular feature of the conversations. All the participants expressed positive views of difference and diversity. It was difference and 'the mix' that was one of the main reasons why they chose to live in London's inner suburbs, and one of the main reasons why these areas were attractive to them. This attraction to difference resonates with Blokland and van Eijk's (2010: 315) findings in their quantitative study of the Cool-South neighbourhood of Rotterdam in which they define many of its middle class residents as 'diversity seekers'. These are residents who prefer and have deliberately sought to live in places characterized by diversity. However, Blokland and van Eijk found that despite this desire for difference, their respondents had very limited social interaction and civic participation in their diverse neighbourhood (2010: 324). In contrast, in our study the importance of the experience of social and cultural difference was particularly emphasized in terms of its benefits for children. Attendance at a school with a diverse population was seen as an obvious and desirable way to immerse their children in difference. For example, Anthea explained that her children gain 'an immense amount in terms of emotional skills and understanding that makes them rounded people which I'm sure I will be very grateful for.' Similarly Carla comments that for her the diversity of Canning School was 'an advantage not a disadvantage'. For Emily too it was providing an opportunity for her children to experience difference that was important,

> when I think about being in London and I sort of think oh it's great for [son] because he's exposed to life in all its different ways, and different groups of people, and he knows that everybody is not the same.

This feeling that diversity and experiencing difference is 'good' for children, whilst expressed here in rather vague terms, can be understood as part of an emergent concern amongst (some of) the urban middle classes to fully equip children for life in a globalized world, giving them 'multicultural capital' (Reay, Crozier, and James 2011) and the ability to move easily and confidently amongst different groups of people.

The interview narratives highlighted the extent to which the schools were seen to work as sites of sociality and routine affective interactions. In Lowfields, an area of established gentrification in Hackney, the participants spoke of it as 'feeling local' and being 'like a village'. Anna commented on the experience of sociality,

> I think this [her] street is very sort of neighbourly .... You may have a few jobs to do on the High Street or whatever, but you have to allow quite a lot of time because you'll bump into lots of people.

All the women had friendships which had been made through their children's past or current primary schools, and these friendships often outlasted the children's relationships, although in some cases they were revealed to be largely

relationships of convenience. Carla noted that although she valued the school networks which she felt eased the children's interaction, most of her friendships with people from the children's school 'are not real friendships'. Rather they are affective social relationships borne out of proximity and daily interaction, and the extent to which they can be defined as friendships is very uncertain. As Carla explained, 'I wouldn't really talk about anything personal with them because you don't know if they are going to gossip.' Carla's description of not really trusting her school-based friendships is very different from Spencer and Pahl's suggestion that 'friendship can act as a vital safety net providing much needed support and intimacy [...] enabling people to relax and cope with the pressures of contemporary life' (2006: 210). Instead, Carla's limited intimacies with parent network-based friendships are closer to those described in the work of Smart, Davies, Heaphy, and Mason (2010) on the demands and competitiveness of friendships. Whilst Carla's hesitancies around parent-based friendships are not understood in terms of difference, she nevertheless highlights the challenges of affective relationships and it is these challenges that we now consider.

Structures, material spaces and limits of crossing difference

A recurring feature in all the interview narratives is the space that opens up between the discourse of mixophilia and the elusive experience of making relationships with a diverse range of others. This lacuna was often expressed in discussions about home spaces and who came into them. As Emily reflected, 'When you think about who's at our house and who he's [her son] close friends with, it is much more similar [to us]'. This was a theme with the other mothers—the likelihood that the children who came home would be like yours, and their parents, like you. The material spaces of friendships and the role of the family home and who entered emerged as a profoundly important dimension of friendship formations. This resonates with the arguments made by Askins and Pain (2011) and Wilson (2012) for recognizing the centrality of the non-human and the material for opening up ways of belonging, exchange and new social relations and/or conversely closing them down (see also Neal 2009). Whether it is the *things* in Askins' and Pain's art activity that offer the 'potential of connection through tactile engagement' (2011: 817) or Wilson's 'turbulent and constantly shifting [...] bus spaces' (2012: 647), it is the ways in which the material drives, binds and opens up social encounters that are important.

So, for example, in our findings, the impact (and force) of social structures and the importance of material space were strikingly apparent in Jeanne's account of her friendship with Ayisha. Connected through their sons' friendship, Jeanne and Ayisha, a Somali woman have developed their own friendship and each offered the other significant mutual support during periods of intense emotional stress. Jeanne recounts the closeness they have but explains how their relationship is always bounded by the lack of a shared private space where they can be comfortable. As Jeanne explained, when Ayisha came to her house 'she didn't ever seem at ease'. Jeanne felt this might be because the house presented a very obvious middle class material environment. Jeanne's feeling was reinforced by Ayisha's reluctance to invite Jeanne to her house. As Miller (2008: 287) notes, home spaces and the objects within these can very powerfully 'speak to the nature of

[social] relations'. Recognizing the way in which her house could make Ayisha 'out of place', Jeanne sought alternative places for them to go. However, going to cafes and other convivial public spaces almost inevitably involves costs, and Jeanne is very aware of Ayisha's anxieties about this. The limited material spaces where Jeanne and Ayisha can actually *be* friends result unsurprisingly in constraining their friendship. As Jeanne explains, what this means is that 'She [Ayisha] feels like that kind of friend, that we could rely on each other in crisis, but I have never been in her flat so we'll stand for an hour on the street corner.'

The materiality of home spaces and who can 'easily' visit and be in them was also raised in relation to children's friendships. Abigail, whose son goes to Milton, the least diverse of the three schools and the most affluent (as measured by proportion of pupils with FSM entitlement, see Table 2), reflects on the relationship of her son and Mehmet, a Turkish friend. In particular, Abigail recognized the spatiality of their friendship and she describes Mehmet as 'an outside sort of friend' by which she means the boys play together at school and play football outside school, but do not go to each other's houses. Abigail comments explicitly on what she experiences as the more emotionally 'manageable' nature of contact between children and adults with similar lifestyles. But she is not uncritical of this exclusivity. As she says,

> I think it's a certain sort of laziness I suppose because if your child's invited around for tea with someone who is pretty much like you, then it's all pretty easy and straightforward, but to try and approach someone else who is a little bit different from you [voice fades] …

What is also apparent in these accounts in which ambivalence and contradiction characterize the participants' experiences of living difference is that the successful negotiation of difference involves work, reflexivity and skill. For Alison living sameness was much less demanding. It is the efforts involved in living difference that we now consider.

Competencies and the uneven labours of living difference

Both Carla and Jeanne would also recognize Abigail's comment about the greater ease of interacting with people like oneself, as they both related stories about the work and commitment involved in negotiating diversity and difference and trying to create mixed friendship groups. The labour involved in engaging and interacting in even the most routine ways in diverse environments has been emphasized by Noble (2009) in his study of intercultural reciprocities, and it was this sense of labour that was often apparent in Carla and Jeanne's accounts of living cultural difference. For example, Jeanne talks about how she sought to encourage her daughter's friendships to move beyond the school and into the intimate spaces of their home,

> [*There was*] a Somali girl Maya [Jeanne's daughter] was friends with probably all the way from Reception to about Year 5. [I] never managed to get her home, even though her parents were very chatty. [*The children*] were very, very close friends at one point … but the fact that she wasn't allowed to come back meant that by Year 5 that [the friendship] was splitting … I tried to mediate with another Muslim family who I said to 'I can do any food for them, whatever' but there was 'thank you we'll think about it'. On the other hand there was a Bengali child who Maya was very friendly with, whose mother couldn't speak English at all. But through a big sister I was able to get a phone

number from the big sister and text back and forth and that was fine. We managed to keep that friendship going.

As well as the commitment and resourcefulness evidenced in Jeanne's accounts of facilitating Maya's out-of-school friendships, Jeanne and Carla both had and deployed cultural knowledge to try and negotiate social and ethnic difference. Their transcripts reveal their awareness of language differences, of anxieties around pet dogs, food and religious requirements. They used these understandings to craft inclusive informal strategies around parties, sleepovers, outings and school activities, and they made extra efforts to reassure minority parents about theirs being a welcoming/safe home. They lobbied to make school social events as culturally and socially welcoming and inclusive as possible. Carla was very critical of a school social and fundraising event that had taken the form of a cocktail party. For Carla this reflected the ways in which Canning School was becoming less mixed and more 'elitist', more white and more middle class. As she explained,

A cocktail party is completely inappropriate … it's something that automatically excludes a third [the school's Muslim population] of the school …. It's like saying you don't belong …. It also excludes because it's expensive. A lot of the white, working class can't afford it … £20 for a cocktail party!

Both Jeanne and Carla had challenged white middle class friends about their exclusive behaviour, particularly in relation to the Parent Teacher Association and its activities, although both tried to avoid seeming in Jeanne's words 'judgmental and aggressive'. Jeanne and Carla recognize and are critical of the exclusivity they perceived in the playground at Canning School, where many white middle class mothers built networks of similar families and ignored others. Carla comments on how particular signifiers in the school playground—such as women wearing headscarves—work to effectively flag to white middle class mothers that the combination of ethnicity and religion means that the headscarf wearer is 'not like us' and therefore not suitable for social interaction:

I remember one of the [white] mums saying to me, 'I just don't talk to the parents with headscarves on' and I said 'why is that then?' and she said, 'oh, well I just feel uncomfortable, I don't approve of them wearing head scarves', and I said 'a lot of them are really nice people'. And in fact she has now moderated her behavior and she does now talk to them a bit and she invites one of the children to her house.

Jeanne and Carla's active labours and engagements in the numerous routine practices traversing and crossing social divisions are particularly striking for going beyond what Sennett (2012) describes as mere 'good will'. Rather they 'deliberately and bravely reach out beyond difference' (Wise 2005: 178). Unlike the parents at Milton School, they both saw it as their 'responsibility' (Carla) to break down the 'invisible walls' that divide people. Both talked of the importance of making often very micro social efforts to connect to and *recognize* other parents, of, for example, being the first to say 'good morning'.

Reaching out to those who look at you in the morning but are not sure whether to say 'good morning'. I say 'good morning' first, they always say 'good morning' back to me and we start a kind of 'oh, how's your baby?' [Jeanne earlier refers to her baby as an ice-breaker with other mothers]. I'm fascinated by all these highly educated, middle class, high achieving socially competent people who

go, 'well, I feel awkward and can't say hello first'. I don't understand it. I don't understand it! (Jeanne).

The 'otherness' of the Muslim population in the UK has been emphasized in recent years in wider discourses of what Husband and Alam (2011) describe as anti-Muslimism. In her research in a primary school, Wilson argues that the Muslim mothers were considered by the white parents to be self-segregating and unable to communicate (2012: 265). Wise draws on Goffman's (1959, 1963) concepts of behaviour and dramaturgy as offering an additional explanation for the lack of everyday ritualized social contact (such as saying 'good morning') between the Muslim and white mothers: the risk of embarrassment if rituals fail ('Suppose the other person does not respond?' 'Suppose they do not understand my English?'), and the anxiety about the discomfort and disjuncture that might be provoked as a result of the failure of rituals of everyday recognition means contact is avoided (Wise 2010: 925).

The emphasis, effort and 'risk' that Carla and Jeanne put into bridging difference are, they feel, a result of their own backgrounds as 'slight outsiders' (Jeanne). This social difference sensibility runs through their accounts of living diversity. Carla is Iranian-English and as she notes 'it could have been me in a head scarf'. Jeanne who grew up in west Africa and is also of mixed heritage was very aware of being from a much less affluent family than her circle of school friends in her childhood. Thus now an adult, she is alert to her own current economic privilege and the difference between her 'visibly big house' and the more disadvantaged circumstances of others.

What is also apparent in the narratives is that Carla's and Jeanne's labour does have successes. We saw something of this in Carla's challenge to the mother above and both Carla and Jeanne relate accounts of the successful development of relationships with other mothers, relationships between children and relationships between marginalized mothers and the school:

> There are people in that playground who nobody ever talks to because they are wearing a headscarf, or they just talk to the other mums in headscarves and I think it's really sad. Once you make an effort with one [mum] you'll see them all changing towards you … so like one asked me for help in finding an English course, because she's seen me talking to another mum in a headscarf […] The fact that Lois [headscarf wearing mum] and Fazell [her son] are friends of mine means that Kate who originally didn't like mums in headscarves […has changed…] now Fazell goes round to play with [Kate's son] …. There are little things that [the head teacher] has done like making sure there's Halal meat at the barbecue, getting the Muslim parents involved so that they don't feel that they are always the outsider … I'm sure that there's all these invisible walls and if you take them down brick by brick all sorts of interesting things happen. (Carla)

There is something of Wise's (2009: 30 and 31) 'transversal enablers' in Jeanne and Carla. Wise defines these as 'personalities who are engaged in facilitating intercultural exchanges' (2009: 10). In her study of working class multicultural suburbia in Sydney, Australia, Wise's transversal enablers 'were aware in everyday terms, of the problems of an uneven distribution of power in a dominant culture guest/host relationship' (2009: 31). Jeanne and Carla share this awareness. Like Anna, Abigail and Emily, Jeanne and Carla encouraged their own children to have diverse friendships, but unlike Anna, Abigail and Emily they went to some length to accommodate and encourage this by providing a safe space for relationships with children from a different ethnic or class

group to their own. They had also both made sustained attempts to involve other mothers in playground talk and school social events. In their everyday practices, Jeanne and Carla exhibit skills and competencies for negotiating difference which extend well beyond the strategies of what Amin (2002: 976) has called living difference through 'co-presence'.

In contrast, our respondents at Milton School (Anna, Abigail and Emily) tended to be fairly reactive to difference and veered towards a co-presence version of mixophilia. Their friendships and those of their children were mostly with those like themselves. There was some acknowledgement of this but also an acceptance, rather than a commitment to the development of social strategies that might deliver wider engagements. But again this was not a straightforward retreat into a co-presence model of living social difference. Anna, Abigail and Emily were reflexive about the lightness and limits of their engagement with social difference. They were often self-critical as Abigail's description of laziness, cited earlier, implies. Emily too spoke negatively of the middle class colonization of Lowfields and described how 'it gets on my nerves sometimes' and how 'it can be insular, but there are so many positives I think it would be crazy to change'.

Anthea, whose children go to Treetop School, differed from Jeanne and Carla but also from Anna, Emily and Abigail in the ways in which she negotiated difference and enacted class in her social world. In particular Anthea's is an interesting narrative because she also represents something of Wise's transversal enabler but in relation to class rather than multiculture. Treetop School, like Canning School, was experiencing renewed interest from the local middle classes, owing to a proactive head teacher, investment in extracurricular activities and the school's reputation as being effective in support of learning difficulties. Anthea had moved three of her children from another local school that was also diverse in class and ethnic terms but focused heavily on the basic curriculum with 'little enrichment'. Anthea is sensitive to and ready to negotiate difference, and especially economic difference. For example, she actively recognizes that children living in the large public sector housing estates which abut Treetop are likely to have limited space and resources and she explains how she uses the nearby swimming pool, and Brownies, because these are

> neutral spaces .... So quite a lot of people will not do home based play dates.... but they will do a meet at the swimming pool .... Loads of the girls across the different social classes and ethnic minority groups go to Brownies.

Some of this class 'care' chimes with Jeanne's and Carla's diversity competencies in relation to ethnicity and culture. Anthea spoke of not to asking some (poorer) children to play too often so as not to create any awkwardness about reciprocating and explaining to her own children why they might not be asked back by their friends. Whether this can be read as thoughtful class work or a way of managing (and reinforcing) class difference is not clear. Anthea's skills around class differentiation and the performance of her own middle class values did bump uneasily into each other at times as this excerpt from her interview shows,

> Erika [Anthea's daughter] will tell you 'they're McDonalds children'. She's not allowed to go to McDonald's but there are other people who are. School shoes are another dilemma, [I have always said] you can have Clarks or Start Rite ... and we had a conversation this morning about where [one of Erika's friend's] mum gets her shoes and you

don't have to go to Clarks and Start Rite! … I said it was my job to make sure her toes were straight and her shoes would sit properly, but [agreed] we would look at whether there were shoes that did sit properly [which were like those of her friend].

For Anthea, the effect of encounters of social class differences in her and her children's everyday lives is uncertain. On the one hand she suggests that the mixing is positive and that diverse primary school friendships offer her children a valuable insight of different social circumstances but on the other, the value of this appears to recede as children reach secondary school age and educational achievement becomes paramount. For example, in a familiar middle class education strategy, in order to secure what she imagines will be a safer educational prospect, Anthea has rented a house close to a secondary school in a nearby prosperous and much more homogeneous middle class locality,

At secondary school I would be much more anxious about peer group and at secondary school I would almost certainly pick a school that was very middle class …. There isn't a secondary school [locally] that offered mixing that didn't scare the pants off me academically and socially.

Anthea is very explicit in acknowledging her anxiety about class here and shows none of the more ambivalent negotiations that were apparent in the discussion about her daughter's shoes. In other words, she presents the need to secure a middle class education environment as an acceptable—and necessary—class practice (Bryne 2006). In all the interviews, a sense of difference from those families who are not like them is palpable, despite the discourses of mixophilia and the willingness and skills of Jeanne and Carla in particular to make and maintain relationships across difference. Difference has to be constantly managed. There are anxieties, particularly in relation to class, about shared values and day-to-day practices (such as the purchase of shoes referred to above) and the organization of children's time and the activities that are allowed. Across the transcripts, there are implicit positionings of white working class and minority ethnic working class parents as either over-protective or verging on negligent.

Anthea, Jeanne and Carla all comment on the protectiveness of some of the minority ethnic parents they had met, describing their unwillingness to let their children go to a relative stranger's house, or into a different cultural context. But this protectiveness was also very much part of their own stories. For example, Emily describes some of her worries in relation to her son's friendship with a white working class boy. She explains how visits to the boy's home left her son feeling insecure and unsafe:

Another good friendship that he has in class is a boy called Mark, who comes from a much more chaotic background. His parents are separated. They're both very much on the scene but they're fairly nutty and Mark's a sweetheart actually …. But if [son] goes out with him, we said yes a couple of times, and [son] doesn't want to do it anymore because it's really chaotic …. They'll go and hang out somewhere, and then maybe someone will buy them some chips at some point. [Son] wants to go and see someone's Lego collection and have a chat with their mum, he finds it overwhelming that kind of situation where you don't really know what's going to happen, he finds it unnerving …. So we have Mark with us because it doesn't work the other way.

Here is a situation, which, as described, is more unsupervised than 'chaotic'. But Emily's emphasis on chaos (as well as 'chips' and

'separated parents') seems to reflect a profound unease about social difference, home environments and styles of child rearing (see Lareau 2011). Emily's anxiety about the suitability of Mark's house for her son and her subsequent management strategy—to have Mark come to her house—is highly class protective. There is an avoidance of class (Emily's son does not go to Mark's house), but a limited and controlled engagement across social difference is maintained because Mark continues to come to her house to play.

Concluding reflections: thinking more about the urban middle classes and friendship practices in super-diverse geographies

Using the accounts given to us by each of these women, it becomes possible to see how friendships and micro, informal interactions illuminate class and cultural practices in environments characterized by ethnic diversity and social difference. In this way the paper brings together super-diversity and super gentrification debates. Whilst we are not attempting to scale up our participants' stories, these stories resonate with the social tectonics model of urban living *and* with cultural competency perspectives. Their narratives disrupt and complicate both arguments. For example, the focus on people mixing and everyday negotiations of diversity and, via Jeanne and Carla, the presence of an emergent BME middle class (Archer 2011; Moore 2008; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, and Gillborn 2011) emphasize the need for a more multi-dimensional account of social relations and their polarizations within the urban gentrification literature. An ethnically diverse urban middle class may mean that lines of division are not always straightforwardly delineated or entrenched. Whilst Jeanne's and Carla's accounts of their social relations are individually specific, their stories show how social divisions may be unsettled. Carla and Jeanne spoke of having affinities and connections across social class. Carla's criticisms of the school's fund-raising cocktail party and Jeanne's experience of economic discrepancies and social class placing boundaries on her friendship with Ayisha both come to mind as examples.

Similarly the focus on urban middle class, mixophilia, multicultural competencies and diversity practices in relation to sustained everyday encounters of difference (their possibilities and limits) suggests that the everyday multiculture approach needs to accommodate the fluidity of social class relations and reflect on the unpredictability of mixing and negotiated interactions across and through difference. Abigail's self-critical acknowledgement that sameness was easier to live and Jeanne's accounts of the difficulties of maintaining and developing multicultural friendship networks for her children outside of school highlight some of the ways in which encounters of difference may have complicated and volatile outcomes. This emphasizes the importance of not adding a 'glow' or romanticizing the possibilities of convivial and competent encounters. As Wilson (2011: 646) argues, intercultural encounter can 'solidify prejudices and antagonisms as much as it can weaken them'. But she goes on to note that encounter is still critical as it 'might produce something closer to recognition than it can to consensus or understanding'.

Following Wilson we suggest that acknowledging the uncertainty of what encounter and people mixing may deliver is important. The various connections and disconnections evidenced in our preliminary study are likely to

become more apparent as the social and spatial configurations of multicultural populations, through socio-economic and residential mobility, ethnically mixed families and new migration patterns, become ever more diverse and fragmented (see Office for National Statistics 2012). We conclude now with reviewing what the findings from the preliminary stages of our project 'add to' the urban middle class and everyday multiculture debates.

The area around Milton School in particular could be described as a middle class enclave; a class colonized primary school, in an area of established gentrification. Our participants' limited social interactions with others—particularly, the non-middle classes—who live in Lowfields, are largely consistent with Robson and Butler's (2001) tectonic model. The account of social relationships around Canning and Treetop schools also displays tectonic features. It may be, as much of our participants' accounts suggest, that urban middle class families, through their social relations and practices, are searching for relative 'insulation' (Atkinson 2006: 822) and even whilst they live in a highly diverse area and use local schools and other amenities (library, park, leisure centre and so on), their social networks remain relatively homogeneous, and difference is effectively lived 'at a sanitized distance' (Butler and Lees 2006). Like Blokland and van Eijk's (2010) Cool-South residents, our participants preferred super-diverse geographies, but as Blokland and van Eijk found, such preferences did not transfer into social mixing practices (2010: 329).

Some of this same pattern is clearly present in our participants' stories, but this is only part of the story. We would suggest that the extent of the commitment of all our participants to living in super-diverse urban localities, to using local, diverse state primary schools, their valuing of multiculture and their (albeit often ambivalent and limited) attempts at mixing needs to be explicitly acknowledged. Similarly the emergence of an ethnically diverse urban middle class also needs to be recognized as this has the potential to disrupt and destabilize the social tectonics model, as the experiences of Jeanne and Carla suggest (also Ball, Rollock, Vincent, and Gillborn 2011). Although Anna, Abigail and Emily did not evidence any particular competencies for living cultural and social difference they recognized and were *disposed* to difference and were able to critically reflect on the absence of such skills and as Noble (2009: 63), in an earlier articulation of Wilson's (2011) argument, suggests, 'recognition is the beginning of something, not its end and the end is never a given'. Anthea's narrative was also striking in that it both works against and confirms the social tectonics dynamic. Her interview narrative makes clear that she not only recognized social differentiation and divisions, but unlike Anna, Emily and Abigail she also used this awareness to develop and inform her own everyday practices so as to be socially inclusive. Yet it is in Anthea's explanations of her secondary school choices that class closures were also the most explicitly apparent.

The emphasis that everyday multiculture approaches have placed on social practices, quotidian encounters and convivial mixing in diverse urban environments have brought into focus the ways in which people routinely navigate cultural difference (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, and Mohan 2013; Noble 2009; Wise 2009). That this can involve skills and competency rather than cultural withdrawal and avoidance has been highlighted in this approach. However, questions as to whether these often fleeting encounters are meaningful

and transformative continue to worry this approach. We would suggest that the experiences of all the participants in the preliminary study do evidence meaningfulness, i.e. they *matter*. This meaningfulness is explained in part because it involves their personal worlds and their children's lives. The experiences of difference are intensely felt—in the emotive materiality of school and home environments—and because they are day-to-day and on going.

Jeanne and Carla in particular demonstrate their capacities for multicultural labour, their awareness and insight into dominant culture and racialized inequalities and their skills, deeply felt commitment and competencies in finding small-scale ways to engage with difference for themselves, their children and within their children's school. Jeanne and Carla both attribute their own identity as mixed heritage women as an explanatory factor for understanding their disposition to engage with difference. This disposition is not without its tensions. The complexities delivered by their middle class identities mean that their engagements and their school-based friendships are facilitated by their class status but are constrained, partial and uneasy as Jeanne's friendship with Ayisha and Carla's description of herself as not quite trusting other parents that she may nevertheless see as friends and of often feeling 'in limbo' demonstrate.

Like other research cited here which has focused on living difference, what our preliminary exploration of social and affective practices reveals are ambivalent, unstable and contradictory interactions; degrees of enacted desires for encounters with difference and some related everyday practices that work—although not always successfully—towards living in more reflexive, inclusive and less segregated ways in super diverse urban environments.

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Notes

1. This is a two-year project currently being conducted by the authors 'Adults' and Childrens' Friendships across Ethnic and Social Difference' (Reference ES/K002384/1).
2. In 2009, an Equalities and Human Rights Commission MORI survey of 1498 people found that

   > four in five people from ethnic minority communities mix socially with people from a difference ethnic background at least once a month outside of work/school, with two thirds (66%) welcoming friends from other ethnic backgrounds into their home with this regularity.

   These findings provided an echo of earlier research by the Commission for Racial Equality (Finney and Simpson 2009: 96) and the Citizenship Survey (Kitchen, Michaelson, and Wood 2006: 20) which both found significant levels of social mixing and friendship patterns between different ethnic groups.

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Abstract translations

La multiculture, des compétences de la moyenne classe, et les pratiques d'amitié dans les géographies surdiverses

Dans cet article nous faisons usage de quelques entretiens approfondis avec des parents des enfants d'école primaire pour examiner la mixité sociale et des pratiques d'amitié dans deux quartiers surdivers dans le nord de Londres. Dans ces contextes géographiques complexes, qui se caractérisent par des processus d'embourgeoisement et des migrations antérieures et actuelles, nous suggérons que les écoles primaires soient des lieux convergents où il est probable que des adultes et des enfants de différents milieux se rencontrent et s'interagissent. L'article examine donc jusqu'à quel point des adultes et des enfants, mêlés dans ces sites, négocier les relations avec ceux qui se situent différemment socialement et culturellement. Les narratives des entretiens informent l'article qui à son tour met l'accent sur l'importance d'examiner de près les micro-façons quotidiennes dans lesquelles la différence sociale et/où l'origine ethnique détermine ces relations et en même temps il examine des instances des façons dans lesquelles ces différences se font systématiquement rencontrées, gérées, ou bien évitées. L'article contribue donc de la nuance théorétique et empirique aux concernes actuels au sujet de la différence et la diversité et les interactions des populations urbaines complexes en « ajoutant » la classe sociale aux perspectives multiculturelles de tous les jours et les perspectives multiculturelles de tous les jours aux débats de la classe moyenne urbaine.

Mots-clefs: Multiculture, amitiés, mixité sociale, différence sociale, classe moyenne urbaine, surdiversité, écoles primaires.

Multicultura, competencias de la clase media y prácticas de amistad en geografías super-diversas

En este trabajo recurrimos a un pequeño número de entrevistas en profundidad realizadas a padres con niños en la escuela primaria con la finalidad de estudiar la mezcla social y las prácticas de la amistad en dos distritos altamente diversos del norte de Londres. Se trata de contextos geográficos complejos caracterizados por procesos de gentrificación y por migraciones antiguas y recientes. Sugerimos que las escuelas primarias son espacios de convergencia en donde adultos y niños de diferentes extracciones pueden probablemente encontrarse e interactuar. En este trabajo exploramos el alcance de las negociaciones de adultos y niños con aquellos que son social y culturalmente diferentes en y a través de estos sitios. Partiendo de las narrativas que se desprenden de las entrevistas, este trabajo destaca la importancia de enfocarse en lo micro, en las formas cotidianas en las que las diferencias de extracción social y/o étnicas modelan dichas relaciones. Al mismo tiempo se exploran algunas de las instancias en que tales diferencias cotidianamente se encuentran, se gestionan y/o se evitan. De este modo nuestro trabajo contribuye con cierto matiz teórico y empírico a las preocupaciones actuales con respecto a la diferencia, a la diversidad y a las interacciones de poblaciones urbanas complejas. El aporte consiste en 'sumar' la dimensión de clase social a los enfoques multiculturales de lo cotidiano y las perspectivas multiculturales sobre lo cotidiano a los debates sobre la clase media urbana.

Palabras claves: Multicultura, amistades, mezcla social, diferencia social, clase media urbana, superdiversidad, escuelas primarias.