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Avoiding the danger of the singular narrative: A case study examining how Year 8 students' understanding of postcolonial India develops over a sequence of geography lessons

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Abstract

Educators sit at an important juncture to help students interrogate the creation and mitigation of distance between the self and the 'other'. This perspective, which emerges from Edward Said's work on 'imaginative geographies' and the growing necessity to decolonize the curriculum, informs this paper's exploration of how Year 8 students' understanding of postcolonial India evolves through a sequence of geography lessons. An interpretivist case study conducted in a Cambridgeshire secondary school, the study employs semi-structured interviews, student work analysis, and teacher observations. The scheme of work developed centred the 'personal geographies' (Sammar, 2024) of students from Indian backgrounds in an effort to foster a decolonial pedagogical approach. Initial findings revealed that students expressed stereotypical and simplistic narratives about India, which were dispelled as they came into friction with lessons on India's geographic diversity, technological advancements, economic disparities, and social development were taught. An observed phenomenon of overcorrection - where students, without critical thought, exaggerated some of the taught characteristics of India before achieving a more nuanced recognition of the subjectivities of place and how its experience can vary at the individual level - highlights the complexity of challenging and changing student perceptions. Above all, the positive changes observed in this study provide a hopeful indication that such efforts to deliver a sequence of lessons on distant place paying credence to multiplicities and nuance - key components of decolonial pedagogical approaches - can lead to meaningful educational outcomes and a more holistic understanding of the world among young learners.

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Introduction

Rationale

Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (1978) explores how the West has historically portrayed the East, or the 'Orient,' as fundamentally different and inferior - a notion deeply embedded in Western scholarship, literature, and colonial policy. In doing so, the concept of 'imaginative geographies' was born, providing a vantage point from which the construction of "supposedly fixed blocks of geographical reality" through language and cultural imagery could be examined critically (Ryan, 2004, p.473).

Said's understanding of imaginative geographies was "distinctly spatial" (Picton, 2008, p.227), positioning geographers and, in particular, geography educators at an important juncture to interrogate the proliferation and mitigation of the distance between the self and the 'other'. Indeed, the teaching of distant place within the geography curriculum provides a ripe opportunity to explore the type of 'imaginative geographies' students bring to the classroom, and how these may become more specific, accurate and nuanced after a sequence of lessons.

Concurrently, the emergence of geography as an academic field of study in Britain has been recognised as intimately linked to themes of whiteness, racism, colonialism, empire, and imperialism, as indicated in the works of scholars such as Craggs (2019) and Esson et al. (2017). Citing these origins and the subject's responsibility for the teaching of distant place, educators in the discipline and beyond have been increasingly encouraged to 'decolonise the curriculum' (Gandolfi, 2024).

This study thus attempts to bring together scholarly thinking regarding the conceptualisation of distant, post-colonial place, examining how students' geographical knowledge develops when plurality and complexity are centred alongside a discussion of real lives in real places.

The theoretical inspiration of this paper is drawn from *Learning to Read the World Through Other Eyes* (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008). This research was introduced to the 2024 PGCE Secondary Geography cohort within a subject studies session on 'Decolonising the geography curriculum'. The paper is designed for student-teachers to, in part, comprehend the importance of analysing and deconstructing prevalent perspectives within discussions of development, education, equality and poverty in order to offer students access to a heterogeneity of perspectives and realities that are frequently omitted from mainstream narratives.

Such an understanding echoes with the work of Pirbhai-Illich and Martin (2022, p.160), who write that "de/ colonising geography education is therefore partly about… inviting different ways of thinking about the spaces, places, and boundaries of geography". This piece of research is my own attempt to integrate such thinking into the development of a sequence of lessons in an English secondary school. In this way, I will explore how Year 8 students' (aged 12 to 13 years old) understanding of India – a postcolonial country - develops over a sequence of one hour geography lessons.

Context of the school

This case study was undertaken at an average-sized comprehensive secondary school located in Cambridgeshire, serving a notably disadvantaged part of the county. Recognising the demographic diversity of students, it was decided that the value of such a range of voices should be centred within this study, particularly during the development of the scheme of work.

Noting the spring term's existing thematic focus and my own interests in exploring the teaching of distant place, it was decided that a mixed ability Year 8 group would be the subject of this research. Prior to the sequence of lessons analysed in this study, I had observed the class over a period of four weeks, during which I supported the class teacher with the teaching of specific sections of previous lessons, gaining valuable insights into student dynamics and learning needs.

Research Questions

In order to effectively examine how student understanding of postcolonial India developed over a sequence of lessons, three research questions (RQs) were devised. These questions provide structure to the study, but also contextualise the findings within a broader conversation surrounding delivering an accurate and engaged geographical education regarding distant places.

The research questions, and the section in which each will be addressed are outlined in Table 1:

Research Question	Section in which addressed
RQ1: *What should students learn about postcolonial India and what is challenging about this?*	Literature Review
RQ2 *How did perceptions of India change over a series of lessons? How do I know?*	Findings & Discussion
RQ3: *How can findings from this study inform future practice?*	Conclusion

Table 1: Research Questions and related section

Literature Review

This section outlines literature relevant to this paper's focus: the study of distant place within geography education. In order to more holistically interrogate existing research and align it with the aforementioned research questions, this section is delineated into two sub-sections.

What should students learn about postcolonial India?

The current National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 (KS3) geography centres the need for teachers to "equip pupils with knowledge about diverse places, people, resources and natural and human environments" (Department for Education, 2013, Purpose of study section, para. 1). "Place-based exemplars" should be used to explain key processes in both physical and human geography and how these interact. Postcolonial India is just one example of many that geography educators could elect to discuss with students to illustrate how places in the world can differ. Indeed, the curriculum explicitly

mentions that students should be taught to "understand geographical similarities, differences and links between places through the study of human and physical geography of a region in Africa, and of a region in Asia" (Key Stage 3 section, para. 3). As a result, India has become a popular case study within UK geography schooling, as evidenced by its deployment across General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exam revision sites and textbooks.

Indeed, the existing scheme of work at my second professional placement school utilized India, and specifically Mumbai and Bengaluru, as a case study to elucidate concepts of rural-urban migration as well as urbanisation. It was thus decided that these concepts would also be integrated into the scheme of work I developed, along with those pertaining to weather and climate, economic activity, and international development. This decision was made as a result of not only discussions with students from Indian backgrounds, but also as a response to case study critiques that note how geography educators are seemingly "obsessed with studying the world of yesterday" deploying extreme examples of phenomena to provide a narrow picture of human or physical geographical processes (Riley, 2014, p.19). The need to develop lessons that privileged a holistic approach to the study of distant place became clear.

In addition, it is important to reference the fact that the social sciences' 'decolonial turn' provides new impetus for the integration of material regarding colonial histories, and at the KS3 level, the idea that the lived realities of those in a 'distant place' have been shaped, at least to some degree, by places – like the UK – in both the past and in the present. Such a perspective was affirmed by wider humanities staff in the department who have increasingly been working to strengthen the links between KS3 geography and history.

What is challenging about this?

Questions of diversity and difference have been high on the geographical agenda for decades (Jackson, 2002). The challenge in incorporating these concepts into geography lessons lies in presenting this diversity accurately and fairly in a manner that all students can access, internalise, and become better citizens as a result. There is, after all, "a direct and essential relationship between the geography curriculum and the development of global citizenship" (Disney, 2005, p.334).

According to Harrington (1998, p.46), "geography is uniquely placed to challenge stereotypes and help children build up accurate and unbiased images". Whilst the first clause of this claim is somewhat

indisputable, scholars – particularly those belonging to post-structuralist and post-colonial traditions – have begun to problematise the extent to which a 'true' idea of a place can ever exist. In the quest to understand what constitutes the depiction of 'authentic' place, geography educators face the need to teach students to think about the multiplicities existing within one place, and the "continua of differences and similarities – of diversity, change and continuity" that connects these ideas to each other and the rest of the world (Picton, 2008, p.246).

A number of scholarly studies have been conducted that further illustrate the difficulties educators face when teaching about distant place.

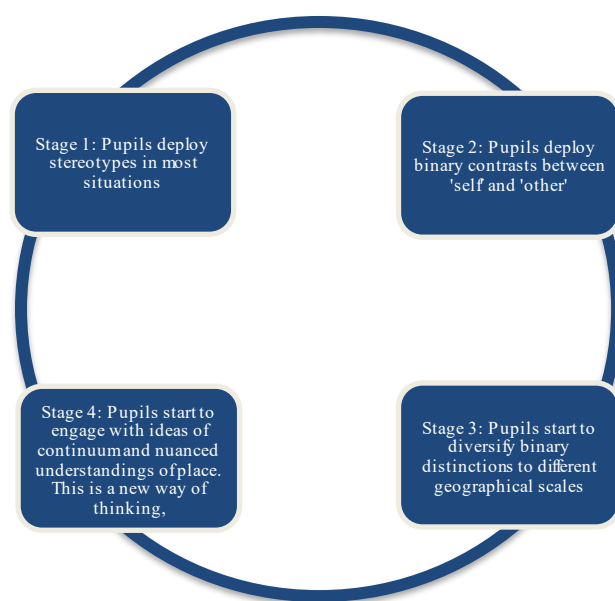**Previous (case study) research**

Picton (2008) engaged in a small-scale pilot study exploring the teaching and learning of Brazil amongst a class of 13 and 14 year olds. The study involved the use of rigorous methods including the deployment of a pre and post sequence whole class questionnaire consisting of a drawing task and questions regarding sources of information and semi-structured interviews with six students conducted before and after the sequence of lessons, as well as concept mapping tasks and reflections obtained during the teaching sequence. The purpose of such data collection was for its subsequent analysis to illustrate if and consequently how sampled pupils made sense of the distant place of Brazil over an 11 lesson sequence.

The study finds that students tended to undertake a two-step process regarding the development of their knowledge. In the first place, students heavily relied on stereotypes to orientate themselves with new material. Such a finding is supported by the work of Martin (2013) who, in their multi-cited ethnographic examination of how primary teachers make sense of study trips to The Gambia and India, find that teachers tend to construct "knowledge from an object-based tradition, overemphasising similarities and promoting an 'othering' disposition towards difference" (p.420). They put such a finding in direct contrast to a relational approach to knowledge which centres the fact that objects of study – whether a country or individual –are "fluid and open to change, complex and diverse" (p.413).

Returning to Picton (2008), students – following a period of learning - are then theorised as entering stage two in his model of learning about distant place whereby students engage in the construction of binary oppositions/binary contrasts.

Whilst students are found to recognise difference within Brazil (representing an important step towards nuance and further stages of understanding), Picton (2008, p.246) asserts that the development of ideas about distant place and their movement from stereotypes to binary contrasts "suggests that pupils need to be taught about diversity and continuum as a way of thinking [about]… the world". The emergence of such stereotypes and binaries in student work are clearly undesirable, and instead "a more nuanced understanding of similarities and a positive perspective on difference" should be sought (p.246).

As part of his research, Picton (2008, p.245) theorises that there lies two further stages of potential student understanding regarding distant place in which students begin to "diversify binary distinctions further to different geographical scales" before deconstructing these binaries to exhibit "more nuanced ideas of diversity, continua, interrelationships, change and continuity". Figure 1 is a redrawn version of Picton's proposed model of learning about distant places which depicts the stages articulated in this section.

Figure 1: Model of learning about distant places based on Figure 10, (Picton, 2008, p.245)

Although the student work sampled in Picton's research did not fully demonstrate the characteristics of stages three and four and can thus be critiqued for its non-empirical approach, these stages still provide a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the data in this paper.

Disney (2005) studied the understanding of students slightly younger than those discussed in this paper, with the researcher asking two classes of Year 5 students (aged 9 to 10 years old) to draw images of how they imagined an Indian school to be like. English children's representations of India in the early stages of the project were found to be enveloped in stereotypes and the "exotic" (p.331). More specifically, it was found that students did not include representations of any form of modern technology, cars or buses.

Following two years of school linking with a school in Goa, students repeated the task, drawing much more diverse and detailed representations of life in India. Whilst her study was much more longitudinal than the sequence of four lessons at the centre of this paper's research and also deploys drawing as the central method of data collection, Disney's (2005, p.334) argument that centring "real people in real places" works to dismantle stereotypes and mitigate against airbrushing reality is a useful finding to be integrated into the development of classroom material as well as in understanding how more complete and complex geographical knowledge can be acquired.

Kennedy (2011) examines the work of twenty year 9 students (aged 13 to 14 years old) from a secondary school in Cambridgeshire and the development of their perceptions regarding Egypt. Through an analysis of data collected through 'window' drawings of Egypt, written work, and classroom conversations as well as a post-sequence focus group, Kennedy (p.54) finds that students initially stress notions of difference between the UK and Egypt and therefore a "widely shared readiness to assume collective appearances and identities (for both 'us' and 'them')". This predominantly manifested in the "orientalist representations of Egypt as, for example, hot, poor, and dangerous" (p.54).

During the resultant focus group, it was found that "students' viewpoints were broadened as they engaged with course material on socio-economic and cultural aspects of contemporary Egypt" (Kennedy, 2011, p.54). Through the delivery of contemporary content beyond the macro-level, student understanding "shifted towards a more sophisticated awareness of internal differences within Egypt and the ways in which such differences can be compared to inequalities not just within the UK but also within other countries worldwide" (p.54). In this way, Kennedy finds an "increased ability of most students to understand an individual country along continua rather than binary terms" (p.54).

Such a finding resonates with the work of Taylor (2011, p.1045) who uncovers that, among the practices of active connection making and categorisation, students engage – particularly initially – in

a strong application of their "existing knowledge of 'the way the world works' to the distant place" studied. This conclusion emerged following the analysis of lesson transcripts, class work and students' reflections from a class of 31 students aged 13 to 14.

For Taylor (2011), for educators to rupture or re-formulate these connections requires not only time but also the subject knowledge and willingness to answer a variety of student questions to facilitate active cognitive connection with novel material. Noting my own experience of living in Delhi for approximately five months and enjoying a semester of study at Jawaharlal Nehru University, it is hoped that I may be able to help students move from comparison to appreciation through providing space in lessons for students to ask their own questions. Whilst Taylor's research focused on the geographical teaching of Japan, the fact the paper was a detailed piece of medium-term longitudinal research conducted in a highly similar case study context to that of this paper provides confidence that its findings may provide relevant material for comparison.

Further considerations

Entangled within such assertions regarding my own expertise, I must also reflect on my positionality as both a researcher and educator. As Picton (2008, p.247) articulates, "educators should be acutely aware of their own ideas about places and those in resources" as these have a significant impact on how young people's conceptions of people and distant places develop. Indeed, Adichie (2009) in her TED Talk covering the essentialist Western view of Africa – a 'single story' – makes the case that when individuals talk about places, they need to talk about power. That is, stories are defined by who tells them and how they are told. Bearing such understandings in mind has been a particular challenge of this paper's research.

Indeed, it is not just students who struggle to conceive of the complexity of distant place. Turning to resources utilised in geography lessons, Christine Winter (2018) explores the perpetuation of colonial values in the English geography curriculum amidst the implementation of the 'Promoting Fundamental British Values' policy. Through an analytical approach combining curriculum studies and continental philosophy, Winter identifies colonial logics in a textbook chapter on Malawi. Whilst this distant place differs from the location of interest, it does indicate the fact that material utilised in geography can centre numerical indicators and division. Such discourses can perpetuate stereotypes, oversimplify complex realities, and maintain a Eurocentric worldview that undermines the agency of those present in the site studied.

This simplification runs in direct opposition to the claims of postcolonial scholars who argue that there is a need to avoid an "intellectual culture of subsumption that reduces examples and cases to exchangeable instances, or conceptual givens, for the benefit of a disciplinary theory culture located in the EuroAmerican heartland" (Jazeel, 2019, p.11). Indeed, Andreotti's (2011) *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* suggests educators must navigate the complex legacy of colonialism while striving to present cultures, histories, and socio-political realities in a manner that respects diversity and agency.

From such a discussion, I can assert that students are often taught and comprehend distant places through acritical binaries (often colonial in nature). As outlined in the methodology section that follows, conversations with students from an Indian background were held in an attempt to work around some of the issues identified in this literature review, in order to develop a representation of distant place enriched by personal and embedded geographies.

Methodology

This paper's research design is that of an interpretivist case study. A case study was selected as it allows research to focus on a bounded phenomenon of interest, providing scope for "in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings" (Crowe et al., 2011, p.1). A case study of the interpretivist scholarly tradition is defined as a "reflexive endeavour emphasising experiential knowledge extrapolated from research participants' accounts for the purpose of generating rich, holistic analyses rather than generalisable theoretical constructs" (Kwiatkowski, 2017). Having said this, however, the conclusions reached in this paper should build a robust picture of not only how the geographical understanding of sampled students developed, but also how such changes speak to existing research, and allow new avenues of research to emerge.

This paper utilizes a grounded theory methodology, whereby theories or insights are "grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed" as a result of the "continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273). Following the collection of data from the selected research methods, a process of open coding was employed. Open coding involves identifying categories emerging from the data. These codes were developed inductively, with inferences following a lines-of-argument synthesis based on constant comparisons made between each student,

and their development during and between lessons (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This analysis is integrated within the discussion and findings section following the methodology.

The sampling technique for this research is purposive. Purposive sampling, according to Wilson (2017, p.175), is the selection of students for sampling "based on how representative you think [the students] are of the group you want to study". Noting the high level of absenteeism in the school, as well as the fact that the selected lesson slot was period one, it was paramount that students interviewed were those likely to attend. As a result, six students with >95% attendance in the class were selected for interview. In combination with this convenience framework, I selected three male and three female students who each had a projected grade in geography of between 5 and 8. None of these students had any additional learning needs. It is at this point worth noting that one female student (student 6) was eliminated from the data analysis owing to the fact that she missed the first two lessons of the sequence. As a result, five student learning journeys were analysed. Summary information regarding participants can be seen here in Table 2.

Student Number	Sex	Projected Grade
S1	Female	8
S2	Male	6
S3	Male	5
S4	Male	5
S5	Female	6
~~S6~~	~~Female~~	~~6~~

Table 2: Summary information about the sampled students

Approach to the Research Questions

Table 3 outlines the actions undertaken in order to address the RQs.

Research Question	Actions
RQ1: What should students learn about postcolonial India and what is challenging about this?	• Examine KS3 curriculum and related schemes of work • Discussions with staff about teaching distant place and postcolonial places, across all Key Stages. • Review literature on learning about distant place and post/decolonial pedagogies, to gather insights on what (and how) students should learn and what is challenging about teaching/learning the topic. • Semi-structured interviews with students of Indian background regarding what they would like on the scheme of work to better inform colleagues (in line with decolonial pedagogy readings).
RQ2: How did perceptions of India change over a series of lessons? How do I know?	• Semi-structured interviews with 5 students prior to the sequence of lessons • Semi-structured interviews with 5 students after the sequence of lessons • Analysis of 'Learning Passport' completed at start and end of each lesson. • Analysis of students' comments in class discussions and the work completed in their books. • Lesson observations completed by class teacher and further observations. • My lesson plans and evaluations in combination with further reflective notes. • Written analysis that synthesises the gathered evidence, categorizes the findings, and cautiously proposes connections to existing literature examined as part of the literature review.
RQ2: How can findings from this study inform future practice?	• Analysis of data accumulated during the project's duration, incorporating references to relevant scholarly works. • Identification of limitations and making suggestions for future practices and investigations.

Table 3: Research Questions and related actions

Research methods

The research methods for this paper include a number of techniques such as *semi-structured interviews, learning passports, teacher observations, pupil work*, and *lesson evaluations*.

Triangulation, or the combination of multiple research methods, is employed in this study as a means to augment the credibility and validity of the research findings. The incorporation of various methodologies in the research design is intended to counterbalance the limitations associated with using a single method (Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, triangulation facilitates a deeper exploration of complex human behaviours, including learning processes, allowing for the presentation of a more holistic representation of the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2003).

Semi-Structured Interviews: Selected group from taught Year 8 class

The choice to employ semi-structured interviews as the principal method for data collection was driven by their ability to offer participants the opportunity to expand on topics within the scope of the research themes, both before and after the sequence of lessons (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Further supporting this approach, White and Gunstone (1992) highlight how the deployment of probing questions enable individuals to thoroughly express their insights regarding the subject matter, allowing participants to more comprehensively demonstrate the development of their geographical thinking. The pre-sequence interviews were held a week before the first lesson on India, with the post-sequence interviews held on the afternoon of the day of the final lesson. Each interview was conducted individually with students and lasted for approximately five minutes, providing a rich set of qualitative data for later analysis.

The guiding questions and responses used in the pre-sequence interviews can be found in Appendix 1 (2 pages), whilst those pertaining to the post-sequence interviews are located in Appendix 2 (2 pages). Note the parallels between these questions and the fact they have been somewhat paired to facilitate more direct comparison between geographical understanding before and after the lesson sequence.

Learning Passport

Before and after each lesson, the entire class was asked to respond to questions in their 'Learning Passport'. These passports were divided into four columns, one for each lesson, and had two questions posed at the beginning of the lesson surrounding the lesson's theme, and then a question below - the same for each lesson - to be answered at the end of the lesson. This decision was taken as a result of Wilson's (2017, p.197) arguments regarding the utility of utilizing student journals or diaries, where she notes that they "encourage the diarist to express opinions and reflect on activities that might otherwise be difficult for a researcher to expose". To elucidate the questions asked to students within such a data collection tool, a template of the learning passport can be seen in Figure 2 (next page), with those questions to be completed at the start of each lesson in the sequence above the dotted line, and those at the end below the dotted line.

Lesson 1	**Lesson 2**	**Lesson 3**	**Lesson 4**
What do you think the climate (i.e. average rainfall or temperature) and geography (i.e. landscapes) of India is like	*What do you think technology in India is like?*	*What do you think the economy of India is like?*	*What do you think the standard of living in India is like?*
What languages and religions might you hear or see in India?	*What jobs might you see people in India doing*	*What might housing in India be like?*	*What do you think the quality of life in India is like?*
Have your answers changed? *(you can use a different colour pen to edit above answers!*	*Have your answers changed?* *(you can use a different colour pen to edit above answers!)*	*Have your answers changed?* *(you can use a different colour pen to edit above answers!)*	*Have your answers changed?* *(you can use a different colour pen to edit above answers!)*

Figure 2: Learning Passport Template provided to each sampled student

Teacher Observations

I provided the classroom teacher with a number of suggestions for types of classroom activity to note down, in line with the research undertaken. These were:

- Evidence of misconceptions, stereotypes or generalisations
- Evidence of comparison with the UK
- Evidence of nuanced thinking (e.g. recognising diversity, relationships between places and countries etc.)

Whilst the majority of the observations noted pertained to my own teaching and the junctions in the lessons when the class spoke about misconceptions, comparisons with the UK and interrelationships, the responses were a helpful reflective tool during the lesson evaluation process and provide yet another source of evidence to support potentially convergent lines of enquiry (Cohen et al., 2017).

Pupil Work

In addition, the classwork of sampled students has been analysed to support claims made about the development of certain aspects of geographical understanding. Channelling the work of Kennedy (2011), 'window' drawings were deployed in lesson three of the sequence. This involved students drawing what they thought a city in India might look like, before adding to and editing the picture at the end of the lesson. These images were then analysed using content analysis to identify patterns of thinking and their modification as a result of the lesson.

Lesson Evaluations

Following each lesson of the sequence, I noted my immediate reflections regarding what I thought students had learnt and the evidence to support such assertions. This data provides a useful reference point for further unpacking which learning activities elicited certain responses, and thus understandings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research address the societal impacts of studies, focusing on how research affects individual participants and the broader community involved or potentially influenced by the research findings (Brinkmann, 2014). This research followed all guidelines outlined in The British Educational Research Association's (BERA) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (BERA, 2018). All students were informed of the purpose of the research as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, the guardians of sampled students had all provided consent for staff coursework. Each and every participant – as well as their work – has been anonymised, with no student involved identifiable from the data included. For those interviews that were audio recorded, consent was obtained, and files destroyed following transcription.

Scheme of work

Pirbhai-Illich and Martin (2022, p.163) argue that central to decolonising the geography curriculum is the active participation and contribution of students, ensuring that "their differences [are] reflected and integrated into the curriculum rather than being categorised as 'exotic'." For the pair, decolonising the curriculum begins with decolonising educational relations through approaching

relationships that support praxis in ways that avoid "extractive, colonial methodologies" that foster thinking "beyond the classification and categorisation of the world into hierarchies" (p.165).

Inspired by such insights as well as the recent Teaching Geography article by Iram Sammar (2024) that explores the power of 'personal geographies' for fostering decolonial and anti-racist pedagogies, the researcher undertook a number of semi-structured interviews with students from Indian backgrounds. Students were informed of the purpose of the conversation and were asked questions regarding the misconceptions they had encountered as well as the type of learning objectives they would seek a lesson sequence on India to integrate (Appendix 3).

Five students were interviewed (three year 8 students and two year 11 students aged 16) and these interviews were transcribed and then openly coded. The themes emerging from these interviews surrounded the need for educators to further explore: 1) the diversity of India's languages, religions and various climates; 2) the level of India's technological development; 3) wealth and its distribution; and 4) the country's level of development.

These insights, in combination with ideas extracted from the literature, provided the framework from which a sequence of four lessons was developed. It was thus decided that tackling the four aforementioned themes would be a central pillar of the research, with each theme thoroughly grounded within specific geographic sites in India to provide a detailed and contextualized understanding. This is supported by the assertion of Taylor (2013, p.104) who writes that "well-crafted enquiry sequences should be able to combine both place and thematic material effectively".

Uniting these lessons was a consistent effort to centre real people and organizations with real stories in order to challenge common stereotypes and provide students with relevant material to probe and explore the multiplicities that make India a rich and rewarding distant place to study. Table 4 (next page) further expands on the developed scheme of work this study explores.

Lesson Title	Foci	Lesson Objectives	Activities	Data Collection
India: A Diverse Journey *5/3/24*	**Thematic:** *Climate Religion Language* **Geographic:** *Across India*	• *To debunk common misconceptions about India's geography, languages, and religions.* • *To use map skills to investigate the geography of India* • *To understand the linguistic, climatic, and religious diversity of India.*	• *Learning Passport (starter and plenary)* • *True or False Facts* • *India or Not Quiz* • *Infographic examination and class discussion* • *Mapping significant places in India on a map using an atlas whilst annotating key climatic, linguistic and religious characteristics*	• *Learning Passport* • *Pupil work* • *Lesson evaluation* • *Teacher observation*
India: Connecting the World *12/3/24*	**Thematic:** *Technology* **Geographic:** *Bengaluru*	• *To understand why Bengaluru is known as the 'Silicon Valley of India'* • *To describe how Bengaluru's population and India's economic structure has changed.* • *To make connections between India's economic development and life in the UK*	• *Learning Passport (starter and plenary)* • *Space Race Quiz* • *Introduction to Bengaluru's location and characteristics* • *Breaking down 'Silicon Valley' nickname* • *Jeremy Hunt in India Video and response* • *Analysis of Bengaluru's population growth and changes in India's economic structure* • *Speech creation regarding key Indian technology industries*	• *Learning Passport* • *Pupil work* • *Lesson evaluation* • *Teacher observation*
India: Economic Contrasts *19/3/24*	**Thematic:** *Inequality* **Geographic:** *Mumbai*	• *To locate Mumbai geographically.* • *To understand the scale of inequality in megacities, using Mumbai as a case study.* • *To think critically about the representation of material and its aim.*	• *Learning Passport (starter and plenary)* • *Drawing what a city in India might look like (starter and plenary)* • *Introduction to Mumbai's location and characteristics* • *Name the Celebrity* • *Introduction to the Ambani's and video on their $2bn tower* • *Photo analysis of Mumbai inequality* • *Videos of life in informal settlements and the material reality for some people in Mumbai.*	• *Learning Passport* • *Pupil work* • *Lesson evaluation* • *Teacher observation*
India: Thinking about development *26/3/24*	**Thematic:** *Social development* **Geographic:** *Kerala*	• *To be able to understand developmental indicators* • *To be able to appreciate the reasons that drive inter-country migration* • *To be able to identify examples of holistic local governance*	• *Learning Passport (starter and plenary)* • *Mind-mapping what makes a place 'good'* • *Predicting HDI and World Happiness Report standings* • *Examining Kerala's developmental indicators* • *Video of migrant workers opinion on Kerala and pull factors* • *Letter writing to local MP on the Kerala Model*	• *Learning Passport* • *Pupil work* • *Lesson evaluation* • *Teacher observation*

Table 4: Overview of scheme of work

Discussion and findings

This section will trace the development of sampled student understanding across the devised sequence of lessons.

Pre-Sequence Understanding

A number of patterns emerged in the geographical understanding of India within the pre-sequence interviews (Appendix 1).

In the first place, students focused on extremes, deploying superlatives and exaggeration to outline what they knew about India, and why it might be worth studying. Every student included the size of India within their responses, with student 4 (S4) noting it has "biggest population in the world right now" and S1 asserting that "Miss says it's really populated now". Beyond this factual recall, students tended to describe India as warm and densely populated, including the phrases such as "very hot and very busy" (S3) and "loud and crowded" (S5). Whilst such quotes are indicative of the first step of stereotyping that Picton (2008) identifies, students were less united and direct in their expression of these generalizations.

Indeed, student stereotyping was not consistent in its direction, with S5 responding that "sometimes I see people online saying how it's hard to live there and money and stuff" whilst S4 notes that he "saw on YouTube …[that] they [India] get a lot of money also because of oil". It is interesting to note that students temper their perspectives through providing their source which, in both cases, was digital material. In this way, perhaps Picton's (2008) assessment of stereotyping as an initial step needs to be updated in this (mis)information era, whereby students can receive content that on the one hand stress the economic difficulties India's residents face, whilst also noting its wealth on a national scale. Perhaps, however, it is instead the case that one can see the deployment of what Taylor (2011) calls the application of existing knowledge of 'the way the world works' with S4 applying their understanding of oil and the promise of its economic benefits to this case study.

Interestingly, both students 1 and 3 made connections between the UK and India's history, citing that "something happened between England and India" (S1) and that the "[crown] jewel got stoled (sic) in like the Victorian times" (S3). Such assertions, although not fully formulated, indicate an

understanding of geopolitical history beyond what had been anticipated. The students' engagement with India's past in history lessons may provide an explanation for this.

Turning to question 6, 'How do you think learning about India will impact how you see the world?', the emergence of two interesting strands of thought can be seen. In the first place, it can be witnessed how S3 engages in a process of 'othering' through the words "if you look over there you see how hard it is to get a job and education… so we should appreciate what we have". Beyond this, three of the five sampled students only cite the idea that the study of India is important in the event that someone might want to live there. Such perspectives will become a valuable data point when they are contrasted with answers to the same question following the completion of the learning sequence.
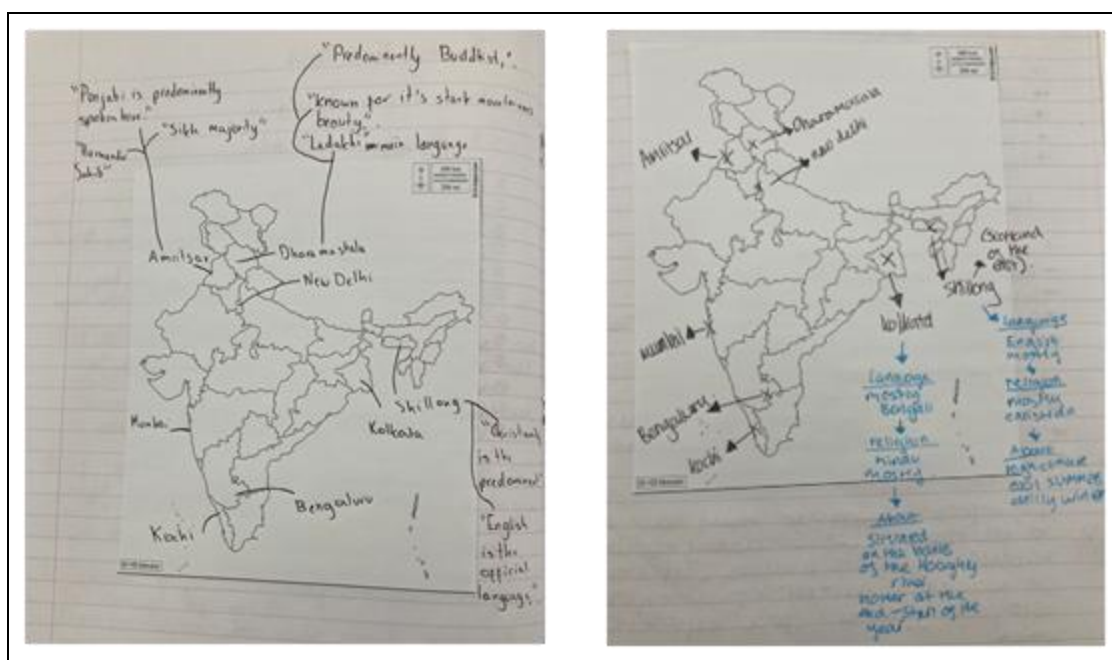
In summary, initial perceptions of India were based predominantly on stereotypes, some of which actively undermined each other. Moreover, the data collected prior to the first lesson showed that students did not seem to value or understand why India was chosen as a case study to focus on.

Lesson One: *A Diverse Journey (Geography, Religion and Language)*

Lesson one in the scheme of work focused on the range of India's geographic, religious and linguistic features. In student pre-lesson Learning Passport responses, almost all students noted that they thought India's climate would be "hot" (S2) or "pretty warm" (S4). Turning to India's religions, only S5 noted a religion other than Hinduism, just as only S1 noted a language other than Hindi as popular in the country.

Breaking down these generalised perspectives was the key focus of this lesson, with the 'India or Not' activity – where pictures of landscapes from within India or otherwise were shown - designed to visually illustrate the degree to which India's geography and climate can vary. Students were tasked with noting whether they believed the picture had been taken in India or not. As noted in the lesson evaluation, this activity was particularly effective in challenging some of these initial conceptions of India. I know this because of the audible gasps of students when actual locations were revealed. This activity very much helped to instil a level of student investment in the rest of the lesson, perhaps bolstering Ross' (2001) argument further that awe and wonder needs to be centred in geographical study.

Indeed, students engaged admirably in heeding the call of Winter (2018) to unpack numerical indicators to develop the resolution with which they interpreted India's characteristics. While Hindi and Hinduism are the predominant language and religion in India, these broad statistics mask deeper intricacies. For instance, India does not designate any language as a national language. Additionally, India has the world's largest Sikh population, hosting twenty times more Sikhs than the country with the second-largest Sikh community. This nuance was further fostered by the mapping task, with students annotating details to various locations across the breadth and width of the country. Student 1 and 5's work seen in Figure 3 below provide evidence of how a broader picture of an entire country can be built by simply zooming in. As part of this process, I worked to emphasise the idea that India could be conceptualized more like a continent than a country as a result of its internal differences.

Figure 3: Student 1 and 5 annotated maps of India

Such a perspective was heavily repeated in the Learning Passport responses, with the terms diverse or different explicitly noted in the work of three students. In this way, one can see, as Kennedy (2011) suggests a movement away from the ascription of collective appearances on distant places. The degree to which this diversity is comprehended, however, cannot be fully – at this point – asserted as the nature of this 'diversity' is not expounded upon by students, at least in written form. Having said this, evidence from the lesson observation points to a more complete appreciation of the concept of diversity, with the observing teaching noting that students during the lesson were able to explain that the purpose the activity was based on the diversities that exist in India.

After the initial lesson, students began to incorporate the concept of diversity into their understanding of India, at least in terms of vocabulary although the degree to which this concept was comprehended was not yet clear.

Lesson Two: Connecting the World (Bengaluru and Technology)
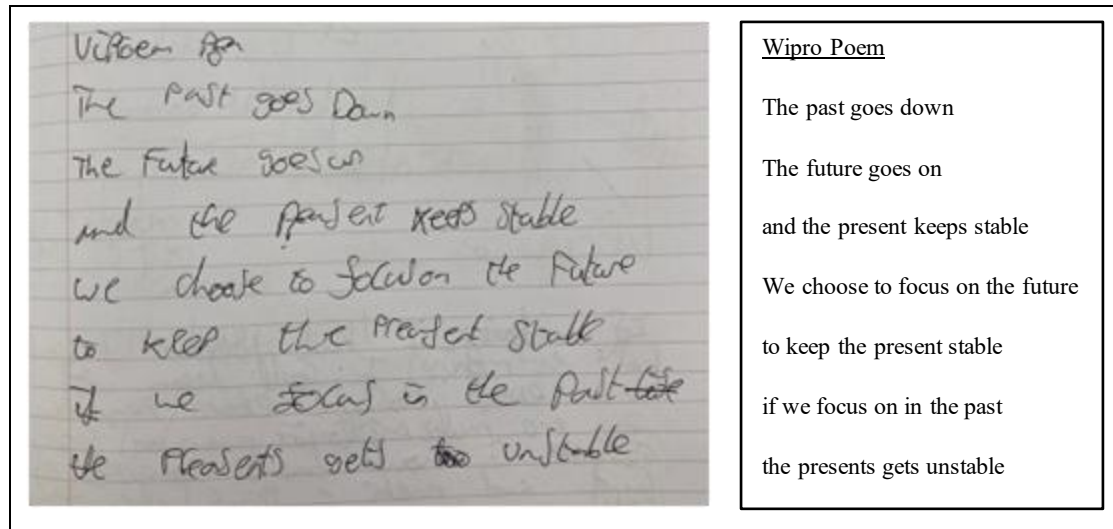
The second lesson in the sequence focused on the technological development of some of India's economic industries. From the pre-lesson Learning Passport responses, it became clear that students were markedly less confident asserting their position on the state of India's technology and job market compared to that of climatic conditions. Concurrently, students 2 and 5 did assert that technology could be advanced or old, good or bad depending on location which represented a more holistic or balanced view of the country's economic landscape.

This lesson was much more fact-based than the first lesson in the sequence as indicated by the bullet-pointed fact-file students were asked to develop and the slide content. However, there was also a strong focus on the connections between the UK and Bengaluru, noting the former's colonial links with the city. The decision to watch the video of Jeremy Hunt's vision was made to reinscribe the changing power dynamics between India and the UK.

In the lesson's observation notes it was noted that the use of relevant facts and figures helped to build a modern day 'picture' of Bengaluru, but it was difficult to delineate whether this picture was understood or simply copied down – especially noting the difficulty I had democratising questioning for understanding. This insight, however, may be undermined by the poem created by student 3 regarding Wipro's value to India and the world (Figure 4, next page). It could be argued, on the other hand, that this out-of-the-box thinking was a creative way for this group of students to make sense of a lesson that provided less space for directly challenging their own pre-conceptions.

Student responses to the post-lesson Learning Passport questions marked the beginning of an 'over-correction' process whereby information regarding Bengaluru's role as the 'Silicon Valley of India' was absorbed and extrapolated inaccurately by students to reflect the entire country. Evidence from this can be seen in responses such as "[India] is very advanced and because of this they have a lot of money" (S1), "10% of India does technology as their job" (S4), and "[India's] the biggest place with technology". I can argue that the conclusions of Martin's (2013) study, although primarily focused on educators, is also evident in the way students now overly emphasize the similarities they have recently

acquired from this lesson. In this way, students begin exhibiting India as having too much technology in opposition to Disney's (2005) finding that students omitted all reference to technology in their early depictions of India.

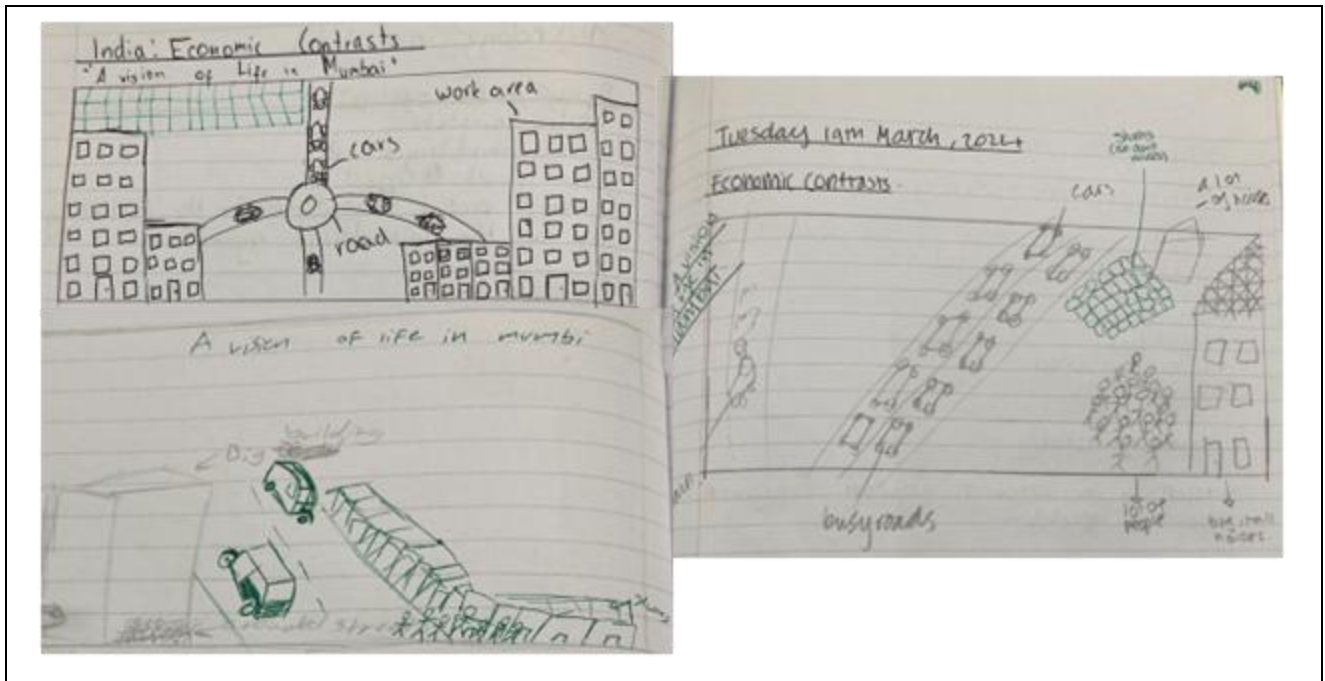| Wipro Poem |
| --- |
| The past goes down |
| The future goes on |
| and the present keeps stable |
| We choose to focus on the future |
| to keep the present stable |
| if we focus on in the past |
| the presents gets unstable |

Figure 4: Wipro Poem

From this lesson, it seems student understanding began to overcorrect and exaggerate the reality of India's economic activity. Rather than appreciating Bengaluru as an example of the height of India's technological development, it was conceptualised as the standard.

Lesson Three: Economic Contrasts (Mumbai and Inequality)

Lesson Three turned to the city of Mumbai, with the focus pertaining to wealth and its distribution within the city.

Within responses to the pre-lesson Learning Passport questions, a continuation of the over-correction phenomenon can be identified with S4 noting that India is "a very rich country" and S1 predicting that the primary job sector would surround "technology and the internet". This perception of India as highly developed and affluent emerged even more forcefully as part of the window drawing task in which students were asked to draw what they thought a city in India might look like. In the work of all five sampled students, the focus of the initial drawings was on more affluent urban features such as larger buildings resembling skyscrapers.

After a learning period dedicated to exposing students to the lived experiences of lower-income residents using images and videos, students added to their images, with all adding details depicting informal, densely populated housing, as illustrated in the selected drawings in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Selected drawings illustrating addition of informal housing

It could be theorised that this unanimity may be a result of the empathy-building exercise pertaining to the life of a child model living in informal settlements which, as noted in the lesson observations was able to effectively engage students.

Turning to the reflections in students' post-lesson Learning Passport answers, a clear movement to binary contrasts can be identified, especially in the work of S1 ("big expensive houses but near are small and cheap houses") and S5 ("some places were really rich, and some places weren't"). Noting that S3 and S4 were unable to pick up on the idea that Mumbai and other cities in India could have internal differences, it seems that this lesson did not extend student understanding of distant place in a way Picton (2008) might have predicted. As noted in the lesson evaluation, I could have used the source of the lesson's material as an avenue to discuss positionality and the power behind representation which may have enabled students to think more critically about the realities and diversities of city life.

In this way, it looks like student perceptions of India may not have accelerated as a result of this lesson despite the fact that there are indications that some students are beginning to think about life at a more local scale. However, by concentrating on the extremes of wealth, this lesson may have inadvertently fallen into the trap Disney (2005) warned educators about: emphasizing the extremities while glossing over the experiences of the majority in the middle.
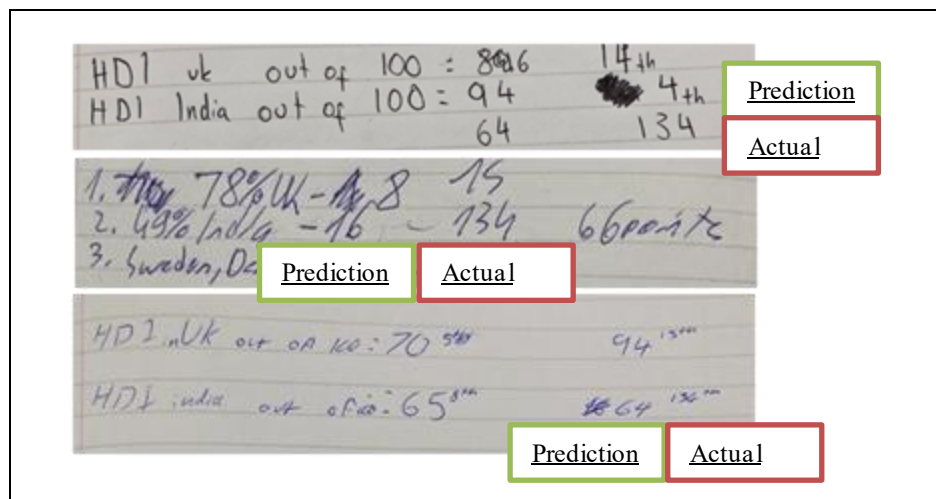
Lesson Four: Thinking about development (Kerala and Indicators)

The fourth and final lesson in the sequence turned to the theme of social development using the state of Kerala as the site of exploration.

An examination of students' pre-lesson Learning Passports indicate that only student 3 engaged in the practice of mass generalisation. By contrast, the responses of students 1, 2 and 5 show how they can now be seen as consistently paying credence to the different lives that may be led within the same country.

Recognizing that the students' initial conceptions of India were shaped by their own value judgments, the beginning of this lesson aimed to challenge the typical developmental indicators or 'judgments' that may have been used through considering how people might 'measure how good a place is?' This worked to foster the curiosity of students who, from evidence in the lesson evaluation and observation, seemingly enjoyed the activity of predicting Human Development Index (HDI) and happiness scores.

While this activity revealed that students had overestimated India's position in various rankings (Figure 6, next page), it also set the stage for them to consider the aspects they might have assessed correctly. This led to a discussion on Kerala's social development virtues. I was particularly impressed by the students' engagement with a video featuring interviews with internal migrants in Kerala, discussing their reasons for moving there. The video, entirely in Hindi with English subtitles, captivated all the students, keeping them quiet and intensely focused, and demonstrated their growing respect for diverse life experiences which were further elucidated in the post-sequence interviews.

Figure 6: Evidence of over-estimation of India's HDI ranking (actual: 134th (2022))

Finally, students wrote draft letters to their local member of Parliament regarding some of the cutting-edge economic, social and political endeavours Kerala has been undertaking. This activity allowed students to demonstrate an understanding of how the UK and India can and should exchange ideas, fostering a sense of global interconnectedness and mutual learning. It also avoided the pitfalls of stressing difference, which Kennedy (2011) identified in students' pre-lesson understanding of Egypt. This activity decision also worked to re-orientate how activities in India can be conceptualised from the perspective of learners in the UK. That is, a two-way dialogue that encourages mutual learning and appreciation, fostering a more nuanced and interconnected world view.

Turning to a change in geographical understanding following the lesson, it is particularly difficult to extract a coherent pattern from student responses in the Learning Passports. Some students assessed standard of living to be "so low" (S4) whilst others note that "a lot of people…are really happy". Such insights cannot be connected in a way that depicts a smooth development in student understanding of India. Instead, these responses are somewhat reflective of this paper's larger framing, that establishing a 'singular story' of life in India introduces a level of complexity that requires time for students to fully comprehend, particularly as the themes and sites of exploration changed weekly.

Post-Sequence Understanding

An examination of Appendix 2 provides an in-depth picture of the overall changes in students' geographical understanding of India following the sequence of four lessons.

Whilst a detailed reading of the pre-sequence interview transcripts reveal responses to have an almost total focus on resources (whether labour or material) rather than socio-cultural themes (aside from cuisine), responses from sampled students following the sequence are far more diverse in their content. Such an outcome closely parallels the conclusions of Disney (2005) who writes of the development of detail and diversity at the end of a sequence on distant place. Specifically, the deployment of appropriate and accurate geographical terminology is a particular area of development identified in the responses, with terms such as technology featuring prominently alongside references to HDI and the upper-class.

In line with the work of Picton (2008) and Kennedy (2011), students also exhibit a recognition of differences across geographical scales. For example, student 2 notes how they learnt "how different the living conditions are just within India" and student 3 responding that the lessons "showed [them] how it's different in all parts of the world and even in one country".

However, there is a case to be made that in stressing these differences which can exist "just across the street" (S2), the sequence may have failed to reflect the realities of India's majority. These concerns were raised within my lesson three evaluation and whilst changes were integrated into lesson four to include data from across India, it seems that these extremes designed to break down misconceptions were not accompanied with the suitable scaffolding of a more accurate picture of life in India.

Impressively, however, in response to the question 'What do you think life is like in India?', students qualified that life quality depends on either who you are, or on how quality could be interpreted. Indeed, three students explicitly stated that "it depends" on where individuals were living. Contrast this to the pre-sequence interviews (Appendix 1) where responses did not centre the experiences of Indian people, but instead focused on general characteristics that the country might exhibit. From this distinction, it is possible to observe the development of students' ability to empathize and think beyond their own perspectives. In this way, post-sequence understanding shows a shift away from merely applying pre-existing notions of how the world works - highlighted in Taylor's (2011) research - towards a deeper appreciation of the complexities of lives lived thousands of kilometres away.
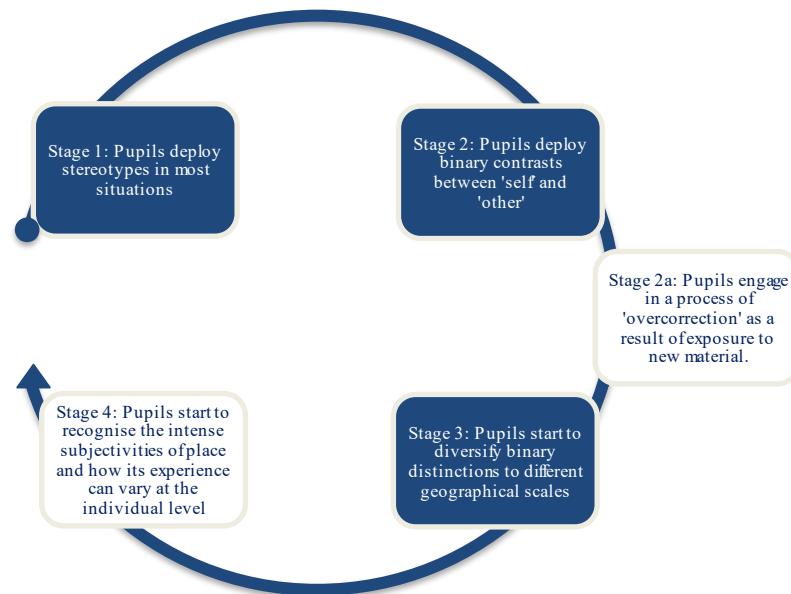
In response to the question 'How has learning about India impacted how you see the world?', a stark change from pre-sequence assertions that learning about distant place was predominantly in the event

someone might move there can be seen. Instead, students 3, 4, and 5 indicated that the sequence of study has helped them to temper their judgements regarding how unencountered places might be. In this way, what could be understood as a movement away from Picton's (2008) assessment that the final stage of understanding regarding distant place is deconstruction, towards a post-modernist perspective of intensive subjectivity can be seen. This capacity for open-mindedness is especially valuable in discussions about post-colonial contexts, where understanding the complexities and nuances of different regions can lead to a more informed and empathetic view of global issues. This framework not only enriches students' geographical knowledge but also fosters a critical awareness that challenges simplistic or stereotypical narratives.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this paper finds a transformative shift in students' understanding of India towards the accumulation of knowledge which begins to reflect the layered complexity of India's geographical, social, and economic features. The journey through the sequence of lessons has markedly shifted students' perceptions from a singular, often stereotypical view, to a more nuanced appreciation of India's diversity and the subtleties of its postcolonial context.

Such a development of geographical understanding largely follows the contours of previous scholars, particularly Picton (2008) and Disney (2005), in the way students utilised stereotypes and strong binaries earlier on in the lesson sequence. Interestingly, however, this research illustrates the introduction of somewhat of an 'overcorrection' phenomenon whereby students absorbed content but applied it as uniform across the national level. This was later rectified, with students developing a recognition of the intense variety of lived experiences that people in India face, and that the practice of generalisation runs in the direct opposition of the development of sophisticated perspectives. Figure 7 (next page) is my own attempt to distinguish the pattern of developed geographical understanding with reference to Picton's (2008) original conception. Those boxes in white are my adjustments to Picton's original conceptualization based on this study.

Figure 7: Adjusting Picton's (2008) model of learning about distant places

In this model of tracing student understanding, an additional intermediate stage, 2a, is identified between stages 2 and 3. Stage 2a represents the period during which students grapple with new information that challenges the binary thinking characteristic of stage 2. This stage reflects an 'overcorrection' phenomenon, where some students uncritically accepted the new information taught. However, it can be argued that by engaging in this period of contestation, students pave the way for the more nuanced understanding seen in the adapted stage 4. During this period, students begin to recognize the complexity and nuances of the information they are processing, and how place can be experienced in deeply personal, individualized ways.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations that frame the scope and implications of this study's findings. Firstly, the generalizability of the results is limited due to the study's case study design which focused on a specific group of Year 8 students (aged 12 to 13 years old) within a single educational setting. This means that the shifts in understanding observed may not uniformly apply to other sampled students or educational contexts. Secondly, the duration of the scheme of work developed - spanning only four lessons - raises questions about the longevity and stability of students' changed perceptions. It remains uncertain whether the nuanced understandings students developed will persist over time or revert to more simplistic views when not regularly reinforced by similar

pedagogical approaches. The possibility of conducting a more longitudinal study on this area would provide much needed clarity on this question.

How can findings from this study inform future practice?

The insights garnered from this research suggest several paths for future practice. The findings of this study underscore the importance of geography educators refining and adapting their teaching strategies to include a wider array of perspectives, especially those from the regions being studied. The decision to incorporate the understandings and interests of students with an intimate experience of the distant place being studied may well be one quick and effective way to move the needle in such a direction. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also ensures that educational content is not detached from the realities it aims to represent. By centring real people and their stories, geography education can serve as a powerful tool to counteract the remnants of colonial narratives and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive understanding of the world.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that in the post-lesson interview student 3 responded that they would "want to know [student] opinion" if they were to teach a class on India. Such an assertion directly echoes the approach taken in planning this sequence in which capturing the opinions of students with Indian backgrounds were central. This response seems to suggest that students have not only learnt about the breadth of diversity India exhibits, but also accumulated an epistemological understanding of how knowledge can be constructed and distributed. If the teaching of distant place was to further prioritise integrating existing perspectives into the planning of distant place learning sequences, geography educators are likely to be able to not only impart knowledge of geographical similarities, differences and links between places (as the curriculum states), but also accelerate the development of global citizenship sentiment amongst students.

The positive changes observed in this study provide a hopeful indication that such efforts to deliver a sequence of lessons on distant place paying credence to multiplicities and nuance – key components of decolonial pedagogical approaches - can lead to meaningful educational outcomes and a more holistic understanding of the world among young learners. As this research contributes to the field of geography education, it also opens new avenues for further scholarly exploration and curriculum development aimed at embracing the full spectrum of global human experiences.

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Appendix 1

Guiding questions and responses from sampled students (pre-lesson)

	Student 1	*Student 2*	*Student 3*	*Student 4*	*Student 5*
What do you know about India?	From History we know that - I kind of forgot – but they did like trades – and then – I don't know if I'm mixing this up - something happened between England and India. I think India was the one who wanted to stop and quit listening to Britain… and I think they got taken advantage of.	I know it has a big population, don't know much else.	How big it is and how rich they were. They had lots of trading supplies like food and materials as well as a crown jewel for the prince. The jewel got stoled (sic) in like the Victorian times. India is also very overpopulated.	It has the biggest population in the world right now and it's in Asia. I think it's pretty rich because its highly populated and I saw on YouTube I think they get a lot of money also because of oil.	It's very populated and a lot of people.
What do you think life is like India?	I think its really nice, I think they [country] is quite wealthy. Miss said it's really populated now. It has a lot of money but shared between the people its about average.	Some parts of it are a lot richer and some parts of it a lot poorer. Quite warm	Very hot and very busy. Doesn't look like easier living than in the UK as very busy and hard to get jobs.	Not too sure. Never been there. If I had to guess I think it might be pretty good.	It might be loud and crowded. I think life is harder as there's more people to do the stuff which means pressure.
What do you expect to learn about India?	I think we might talk about jobs and food maybe cus I know different countries have different cuisines. In History, we learn about India's we don't really know about the present (especially those people who haven't been there). Because we haven't been there we still think it is like in the past.	About the culture and how people live and where they live.	In geography they might teach you about the continent and population. In history, about the prized jewels and the history of India.	Stuff about traditions and their culture and where they are and how big they are.	Maybe population because we are doing that topic at the moment.

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5
What would you like to learn about India?	I want to know about the present for example jobs, food, housing as haven't really seen housing and I want to see how its spread out.	Not sure.	Probably, their recipes and that.	/	It's economy because sometimes I see people online saying how its hard to live there and money and stuff.
Why do you think we study India?	It might just be because it's a quite big country and a lot of original things go back to it. I know they made really nice stuff and because what we learnt in history – England took some of it and sold it to others. India has really good and original ideas.	I'm not sure.	It's one of the most biggest countries and there's a lot to learn about it.	I think because it's the most populated country in the world right now.	Maybe it has more resources or something.
How do you think learning about India will impact how you see the world?	I think its really nice because most people don't want to stay in one country and its really nice to know how other countries work but some people might not have the opportunity to go to other countries but still want to know about it.	So we know that other people live differently and think differently.	If you look over there you see how hard it is to get a job and education and that so then if you think you are really hard done by you should look at other people and places around the world. Their education [in India] can be a little bit low and a lot of them are helping their parents and grandparents out. So we should appreciate what we have.	Yeah, if I wanted to live in India it would help to know some stuff about it.	Maybe like if you move there its good to know some stuff.

Appendix 2

Guiding questions and responses from sampled students (post-sequence)

	Student 1	*Student 2*	*Student 3*	*Student 4*	*Student 5*
What have you learnt about India? (What first comes to mind or feels the most important?)	I was surprised that there was a main city that was really developed with technology and then there was a road behind it with people not working in technology… were living quite a different life and it was just a road after.	I thought how diverse the amount of money people have is, and how different the living conditions are just within India.	The rich and the poor like you've got the slums built right next to really rich places for example the Ambani tower surrounded by slums.	10% of people there work in technology. There are a lot of slums in some places in like bigger cities. I learnt that they have lots of religion, not just Hindu as in the part near China there's Buddhism, on the right side Christianity is more popular and in the middle more Hindu. I thought India's HDI was going to be a bit higher.	That tall expensive building. Stood out as I thought India…most of the time people think it's a poor country. And the technology is quite advanced compared to what I thought before.
What do you think life is like India?	It is quite good if you think of the majority. It has a large land area and is successful and has technology and all that. I think it has gone far.	Depends where you live and how much money you make.	It depends on where you are living, if you are living in slums it's not a great place to live as you might be hungry or might not have clean water whilst if you're upper class – like the Ambani family – they are living their best life. They are really rich, have food, clean water and have a nice place to live in comfort.	It depends if you're living in slums or a house. In Kerala get paid loads of money and everyone moves there because you can get a house.	Happy even for people who don't have a house they still have their family.

	Student 1	*Student 2*	*Student 3*	*Student 4*	*Student 5*
What surprised you about what you learnt?	*SEE ABOVE*	I didn't expect the nice blocks of flat across from the street from the slums. It was just across the street!	Technology. Their technology is better than most countries, might even be better than ours. They are literally being able to control the metaverse. There's that one big building that from the outside doesn't look like much, but inside bright lights and a bunch of technology.	I didn't think that there would be slums because there was quite a lot in that video and they made them all by themselves.	*SEE ABOVE*
What would you teach someone about India? What did you like learning about India?	Definitely housing and jobs because it is not something we talk about in History or other subjects. It was something different and so I'm sure I will remember it.	Not sure.	I'd want to know their opinion. Most people's opinion is it's a really poor country, there's not much to look forward to travelling to India, there's not a lot of money and its kind of like a wasteland… but its not really true if you kind of look at the upper class.	About religions and how it has like different states. I forgot how many – I think 28 states.	Probably the one about advanced technology, because that's what kids now are interested in.
How has learning about India impacted how you see the world?	We don't talk about all of the countries, and so just knowing that like one country has like two different kind of sides – one isn't that lucky and the other is really advanced - it's like now I really want to know more about other countries and know their story.	Not changed much.	If I was to go to a country everyone classed as poor, I shouldn't judge it the same way they do before I look into it. Like if I look into it like we looked into India - to begin with I just thought India was a really poor country and had nothing special about it but then we looked and saw special stuff about it like the technology and buildings.	It showed me how its different in all parts of the world and even in one country some cities there slums and in other. And so its not all the same in one place and there might be differences in the different parts of the countries.	I think people mostly focus on the poor people but its not always like that.

Appendix 3

Guiding questions and responses from students with Indian backgrounds

	Student A	*Student B*	*Student C*	*Student D*	*Student E*
What have you learnt about India in school?	India is a big place that it is polluted.	Nothing I can remember.	/	/	/
What misconceptions do you think your friends have?	They tend to think of villages, and crammed places and scammers. Actually, my family in India are all business people actually. They have mansions in Kerala.	They think its super poor and that the only food is curry.	They always think that India doesn't have any money like if you go on TikTok you just see gross food. They think its just villages or that we live in huts but that's not true. A lot of people who own big companies and stuff are from India. People only see the bad side of India, not the good.	I think they have an inaccurate picture of the religious and geographical features of India.	They think India is low technology and quite similar across the country.
What would you like students to learn?	The should learn about places like Delhi and Kerala. Teachers should focus on the way people are and talk about community and religion. Overall, India is much more developed than people think it is.	That there is lots of diversity in terms of food but also languages and religions. People need to know about how bright and exciting the country is!	India is so diverse and there's lots of states – everywhere is going to be different. I would show them actual pictures of India because I think Google only shows the poor parts when there is actually a middle class and people in government and upper class can be very very rich.	I would want them to learn about Independence and the legacy of colonialism. I would want students to have an updated understanding of the variety of religions and landscapes (like in Kerala the nature) as well as the very large cities and their development.	I want them to learn how advanced India is and about the multiple languages and parts of the country. I would teach students about Mumbai and the Ambani Tower and this contrast with the slums next to it.

CODES:

Language, Religion, Climate   Technology   Wealth/Inequality   Development