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## Local practice, translocal people: conflicting identities in the multilingual classroom.<sup>1</sup>

### REVISED VERSION FOLLOWER REVIEWERS' COMMENTS.

#### Abstract

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Increasing rates of migration to the global West are focusing attention on the experiences of young migrants in schools. Too often, these young people are identified in terms of linguistic deficiency, ~~but~~ and this obscures the skills, experiences and expectations of formal education that they have developed before or during their migration. This article focuses on one learner, 'George', and shows how he adapts his experience of learning in Ethiopia to his new school in London, UK. The data are drawn from a broader ethnographic study of young migrants in one South London school, using extensive participant observation and interviews to argue that the challenges he faces are more related to differing expectations of schooling than they are to a lack of English-language skills. Theoretically, this paper uses Pennycook's (2010) notion of 'local practice' to show how young migrants are constantly adapting (or 're-localising') their expectations of how schools and teachers *should* behave to make sense of how they *do*. It further introduces the notion of 'trajectory' to historicise classroom learning, an analytical approach that places situated, local performances of sameness and difference on a broader migration trajectory.

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Key words: EAL, ~~local practice~~, trajectory, language minority students, bilingual education

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## Introduction

Increasing rates of migration to the global West are focusing attention on issues of integration and the extent to which recent migrants engage with civic values, state institutions and – perhaps most prominently – the majority language. For adults, political and media attention in the UK has often focused on the availability of English-language (ESOL) classes, access to the job market and concerns about security (see e.g. Simpson and Cooke forthcoming [2017](#)).

The focus has been different for younger migrants, whose participation in compulsory schooling brings very specific ways of understanding integration, attainment and **appropriate** behavioural ~~norms, oriented towards mastery of the curriculum and interacting with teachers.~~

~~Formal schooling tends to see these young people on only two clines: their mastery of English and their readiness to access the curriculum. Both tend towards an ideal: the bilingual student whose command of an unproblematised ‘English’ effectively allows other elements of his linguistic and cultural repertoires to be erased; and who is able to engage with the curriculum on the same terms as his non-migrant peers.~~

~~This paper addresses that idealisation by looking closely at how one young migrant, who chose the pseudonym George, describes his schooling in the UK and in Ethiopia. It shows a constant struggle to make his voice heard and to persuade others that his experiences of learning elsewhere are relevant to the classroom in his South London school. Such a focus is important because, as Anderson *et al* (2016: 1) note, it is ‘striking’ how young migrants’ own ‘accounts of their experiences are conspicuously absent’ from the research and policy literatures. In the UK, this is compounded by a lack of research into the experiences of late adolescent migrants or secondary school settings (Andrews 2009, Conteh forthcoming, 2017). Studies that do address this age group often foreground the norms of schooling and show how the young people ‘draw on their cultural, educational and linguistic resources to become pupils in the new setting’ (Wallace 2011: 98), rather than foregrounding the young~~

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people's experiences and showing how they seek to adapt the school to their own expectations.

Parallels can be drawn with other parts of Europe, where similar patterns of transmigration are creating 'new and complex markets for linguistic and communicative resources'

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(Blommaert 2010, 3). Jaspers (2005), for example, describes how Moroccan students in

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Belgium engage with 'widespread linguistic ideologies and commonly articulated identity categories by constructing playful linguistic sabotage' (p. 280). Such parodying of teachers' voices can be seen as a form of Bakhtinian double-voicing, a way for young people to contest the cultural assumptions that their teachers have of them (Blackledge and Creese 2009). Such contests are deeply important to the participants, and not always playful. In Germany, Çelik (2015) shows late-adolescent migrants responding to perceived discrimination (or negative assumptions) by placing a 'reactive' emphasis on their Turkish ethnic identity that 'accentuates group differences, heightens group consciousness of those differences, and hardens ethnic identity boundaries' (p. 1658). The Amager project in Copenhagen, similarly, found that the institutional dominance of Danish could lead young people to treat their other languages as transgressive, even in private interactions (Madsen *et al.* 2013, 22-23).

Increasingly complex patterns of transmigration in Europe mean that education systems and young migrants are increasingly at odds: for the former, the dominant expectation is that new arrivals will settle, adapt to the norms of schooling and 'become "invisible", a truly integrated member of the school community [...] as soon as possible' (Derrick 1977: 16). For the latter, this school may be one of several encountered over period of years (and which may also include faith- or community-based education, see e.g. Lytra et al. 2016, Blackledge and Creese 2010). There is an urgent need, though then, for studies that take this focus on classroom interaction and see it as part of a longer process of migration, in which people, places and experiences that are far away in time and space can be vividly present centrally

relevant. There has been some work in this approach from scholars of higher education — Harvey (forthcoming) has characterised international migration among HE students as part of a Bakhtinian process of *ideological becoming*, in which language and intercultural learning are immanent to their ways of *learning to be in the world*. Hayashi (2013) casts similar processes as developing ‘transnational ways of being and belonging’, and Badwan (2015) has described the ‘exchange value’ of linguistic and cultural capital from other national contexts — but little has been done to historicise the significantly different experience of young migrants in compulsory education.

Formal schooling, however, tends to see these young people on only two clines: their mastery of English and their readiness to access the curriculum. Both tend towards an ideal: the bilingual student, whose command of an unproblematised ‘English’ effectively allows other elements of their linguistic and cultural repertoires to be erased; and who is able to engage with the curriculum on the same terms as his non-migrant peers.

The classroom is a significantly under-theorised space when it comes to the education of young migrants. This is partly because these classrooms are so diverse: some learners stay in mainstream classes, with or without specialist support; others are ‘withdrawn’ for English-language lessons or — as in the case of this study — a transition programme designed to prepare them to access the mainstream curriculum or the workplace. It is also because the students are an enormously diverse group: truly super-diverse (Vertovec 2006, 2007) in the sense that the participants differ along a large number of continua, including their legal status, their economic resources, their access to local networks, their prior education, their literacy practices and their experiences of migration. ~~Formal schooling, however, tends to see these young people on only two clines: their mastery of English and their readiness to access~~

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~~the curriculum. Both tend towards an ideal: the bilingual student, whose command of an unproblematised 'English' effectively allows other elements of their linguistic and cultural repertoires to be erased; and who is able to engage with the curriculum on the same terms as his non-migrant peers.~~

Recent studies have sought to develop new visions of young migrants in education. In the UK, much work has been done on expanding the scope of enquiry to include faith settings (e.g. Gregory and Kenner 2013; Gregory et al. 2013, and the work of the BeLiFS project at Goldsmiths, University of London) and complementary schools (e.g. Lytra and Martin 2010, Blackledge and Creese 2009; Sneddon 2014). Others, internationally, have explored the interaction between young multilinguals and monolingual institutions. Heller (2006, 29), for example, has shown how the lack of legitimate spaces for different forms of ethno-linguistic identification can lead minority groups to create a 'fictive unity' that reproduces some elements of the institutional hierarchy they are contesting. Canagarajah (1997), Conteh and Brock (2010) and Chick (1996) have identified the creation of 'safe houses' or 'safe spaces', or the use of 'safe talk', to create space for diversity in the classroom.

~~There is an urgent need, though, for studies that take this focus on classroom interaction and see it as part of a longer process of migration, in which people, places and experiences that are far away in time and space can be vividly present. There has been some work in this approach from scholars of higher education — Harvey (forthcoming) has characterised international migration among HE students as part of a Bakhtinian process of *ideological becoming*, in which language and intercultural learning are immanent to their ways of *learning to be in the world*. Hayashi (2013) casts similar processes as developing 'transnational ways of being and belonging', and Badwan (2015) has described the 'exchange value' of linguistic and cultural capital from other national contexts — but little has been done~~

~~to historicise the significantly different experience of young migrants in compulsory education.~~

### *Historicised trajectories, contact and local practice*

The present paper brings that historical perspective into focus. It does this by conceptualising the classrooms as just one locus in the participants' broader life-history and migration trajectories. The use of 'trajectory', here, emphasises the young people's perspectives. They have been 'shaped by different learning environments and their varying respective cultures' (Budach 2014, 525), and these form the lenses through which they will see their new school. This is in contrast to the institutional perspective, which positions young migrants in terms of their ability to access the curriculum and their command of the majority language.

Trajectories are patterns of movement and encounter, non-linear and with no predetermined endings (Blommaert and Backus 2011). At earlier points, they will have intersected with others, each point of intersection representing an encounter with people, objects, ideas and institutions; these will have contributed to the young person's expectations of how schools operate and what behaviour is the norm. Foregrounding such encounters allows a detailed analysis of the tension between the young person's expectations of schooling and the school's expectations of the young person.

Key to this is an understanding of classrooms as 'contact zones', spaces where different trajectories intersect. Pratt (1987, 1991; see also Canagarajah 1997, 2013) contrasts the view of classrooms as contact zones with that of traditional studies of interaction and communication, which she suggests are rooted in ideals of 'orderliness', 'single sets of shared rules and shared understandings' (1987, 51). Metaphors of 'games' are commonly used in

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studies of interaction, she argues, but these assume relatively stable communities in which knowledge of the 'rules' is widely shared:

in these game-models, only legitimate moves are named in the system, where 'legitimate' is defined from the point of view of the party in authority. Teacher-pupil language, for instance, tends to be described almost entirely from the teachers' point of view.

(Pratt 1987: 51)

This focus on trajectories (to emphasise the prior experiences that the young person brings to the classroom) and contact (to weight different norms more equally) underpins this analysis.

Rather than approaching the young people through the categories offered by the education system (such as their status as English learners, or as new arrivals to the country) it allows a more explicit focus on the series of encounters that have shaped their sense of how teachers and students should behave.

~~The use of 'trajectory' here is an analytical construct that distinguishes the 'here and now' of the data, recorded in the 'ethnographic present' (Brodkey 1987, 72), and people, places and events that are more distant in time and space. The use of 'trajectory' here is an analytical construct that distinguishes the 'here and now' of the data, recorded in the 'ethnographic present' (Brodkey 1987, 72), and people, places and events that are more distant in time and space.~~  
In the broader study from which this paper is taken (see below), this would include the use of mobile devices and social media to communicate with friends and family elsewhere during a lesson (temporally present but spatially distant), or to access religious texts and language learning apps in the classroom (temporally and spatially present, but depending on social, cultural and economic contexts that are more distant). This can have explanatory power: when young people behave in ways that contravene the classroom norms, sometimes a root cause can be fairly transparently seen in earlier

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~~experiences (such as a student who reacts violently to minor provocations after a very challenging migration journey, re-enacting spatially and temporally distant experiences in the here and now). As an analytical approach, the focus on ‘trajectories’ allows robust connections to be made between classroom behaviour and prior experiences.~~

The young person at the centre of this study is George,<sup>2</sup> a 14-year-old from Ethiopia who had been at Pine Wood Academy (the school where this research was based) for approximately one year. Rather than taking his arrival at Pine Wood as the starting point, this ‘trajectories’ approach means investigating the different educational contexts that he has moved through and treating them as parts of a single process. He speaks eloquently about his experiences of learning in both Ethiopia and London, where he attends a transition programme at Pine Wood as well as weekend classes at a local tuition centre. ~~Rather than seeing each classroom as unique and historically separated, data describing his learning experiences can be plotted on a broader trajectory through time and space: not linear, but connected in complex ways, as this paper will show.~~

Nexus points (cf. Scollon and Scollon 2004, 2007) emerge in the data where participants make reference to people and places that are temporally and spatially distant, but relevant to the interaction in the present: each suggests a potential framing for the research. George’s mainstream classroom is an obvious nexus: I have extensive notes and recordings of him there, but at the beginning of the research he was finding the process of adaptation difficult and was less willing to discuss it. In contrast, he was keen to talk about the extra-curricular lessons he attends on Saturdays and Sundays. He spoke highly of the teachers and was very proud of his achievement in tests that he described as more challenging than those at Pine

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<sup>2</sup>~~All names are pseudonyms.~~

Wood. These weekend classes form another cluster in the data, one accessible through interviews and by comparison with the materials and curriculum we both had access to in the school. The final nexus, the most distant in time and space and the least accessible for data collection, was his schooling in Ethiopia. He describes his lessons, peers and teachers there in detail, layering them with impressions of other participants.

Pennycook's (2010) theorisation of language use as local practice allows this broader trajectory to be brought into the analysis. ~~We will see~~ George 're-localising'-localises' practices from earlier points on his trajectory into the specific social, temporal and spatial conditions of his South London school. Analytically, this allows the study to de-emphasise the classroom in which ~~the researcher George and I~~ were present and creates space for George to bring in other learning spaces on (as much as the monovocal format of a research paper will allow) his own terms. As Pennycook puts it:

Understanding the performativity of language in relation to relocalization allows for an understanding of utterances as never outside a locality, nor determined by it.

(Pennycook 2010, 48)

'Local practice' ~~here, in his usage,~~ is often focused on explicitly creative production, such as hip-hop (see also Pennycook 2007) or visual art, with repetition as conscious sampling for effect. This is not what we is seen in the classroom: ~~we see~~ the data show young people trying to make sense of the world around them, drawing on what they know and using language, objects and gesture to mediate the discursive positionings that are available to them (see e.g. Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Blackledge *et al.* 2008, Rampton 2006). This, though, is concordant with the concept of localisation:

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an understanding of language as a local practice needs to accept that in the relocalization of language, language acts do not enter the same flow twice: to say the same thing again, whether as an everyday language act or as an intentional act of mimesis, to invoke difference through sameness.

(Pennycook 2010, 45)

This juxtaposition of difference and sameness is central to the analysis of young migrants' adaptation of and to different classrooms. It allows ~~us the study to model~~ examine how ~~students-young people~~ draw on different *ways of being* a student. With no other information, we are likely to perform according to the rules we know, but when the locus changes (cf. Blommaert's 'timespace', Blommaert 2015a, 2015b) this performance can be read in dramatically different ways.

Importantly, Pennycook's notion of local practice can be understood as moving away from a linear educational or migratory trajectory. Rather than seeing the mainstream classroom as the most important learning environment, and the student's integration as a process of moving towards that ideal, Language as a local practice:

Language as a local practice [...] is not only repeated social activity involving language, but is also, though its relocalization in space and time, the repetition of difference.

(Pennycook 2010, 43)

Those different ways of being, which Gee (2005, 21) called ~~small~~big-d-D discourses, learned in different schooling environments, are repeated through time but not sequentially towards a goal of integration. Rather, Pennycook's local practice can be seen as adaptation, ~~of~~as

making sense of the present by reusing and modifying ways of being that have proven their value before.

Finally, this interpretation of local practice moves beyond the essentialism of linking different ethnic groups or national origins with specific learning styles or educational practices. 'Authenticity' is seen as a process of constant (re-)localisation, rather than as fidelity to a static ideal. It is seen in the performance of elements from the past in new configurations:

Once we see the possibility that to be original or authentic [...] is not about what is supposedly tied to an apparent identity, but is rather a question of relocalization, then we can see that questions of origins become highly suspect [...]

If we accept the possibility that the mimetic enactment of language may radically relocalize what superficially may appear to be the same, then a use of English [...] may be full of multiple meanings of identification, localization, imitation and reinterpretation.

(Pennycook 2010, 49-50)

Young migrants' classroom practices, then, can be seen as performances of complex personal histories. ~~If~~This assigns considerable agency to the young person as someone who actively re-uses his knowledge of how classrooms have operated before and how they are expected to operate now, and adapts his performance as his understanding deepens.

### **The present study**

The present study is drawn from a much larger linguistic ethnographic project that followed two classes of migrant learners for almost two school years. This section outlines the context

in which that study was conducted and the methodology it employed, before turning to some brief biographical notes on George himself.

### *Context*

The setting is the withdrawal-transition programme of a large secondary academy in South London, known as the 'International' programme. This is effectively a school-within-the-school, home to some 10% of the academy's pupils but following its own curriculum, selecting its own examinations and operating with a high degree of independence from the 'mainstream'. The programme only accepts pupils from school year 10 and above (aged approximately 14 and over) who therefore arrived relatively late in their school careers. On arrival, they are assessed for their English-language level and placed into one of five mixed-age groups. At the lower levels, where this study was set, the curriculum is centred around English-language and mathematics lessons, with some drama, art and sports. ~~At the higher levels the proportion of subject lessons increases, with intensive GCSE classes (for school-leavers) in the top two groups.~~ The programme is explicitly positioned as a transition programme, in which students are expected to progress through the groups each year and to leave with relevant qualifications no matter how long they spend in the programme.

George was aged 14 at the time of the study and arrived in London in 2013. He was given a place at Pine Wood Academy and initially joined the mainstream classes there. ~~His teachers report that he struggled: he was bullied and found it difficult to fit in, and t~~The following year he was accepted into the International programme. His teachers described him as having difficulty in relating to his peers and he was involved in fights with other pupils. ~~In-At the beginning of~~ the broader ethnographic study; he ~~was-would often be often~~ the first to raise his hand, always keen to help distribute textbooks and to make himself useful, but also obviously

not quite fitting into the routines of the classroom. He would volunteer to answer questions so often that it began to irritate his teachers and peers, ~~and there were sometimes groans when he called out answers~~. It appeared that this was a young man who wanted to be seen as a successful learner, perhaps to gain the social capital that came from being recognised as such by others, but something was not working for him.

### *Methodology*

I observed the two lowest-level classes in the International programme between December 2013 and June 2015, ~~or the majority of two school years~~. I visited once each week in the first year and twice weekly in the second, observing an average of three lessons per day and interviewing staff and students throughout. I would sit in the class with the students, talking with them about the work and their peers as I did and recording interviews either mid-lesson or immediately afterwards. George was chosen for this paper because his interactions with the teacher stood out: he appeared to be very keen to be seen as a well-behaved student, particularly in his mathematics lessons with Jake (also a pseudonym), but consistently struggled to be treated as such~~This paper focuses particularly on George's interactions with his maths teacher, Jake. Our own relationship was not particularly close: although the fieldwork involved working with most of the young people at some point, George was more focused on the teacher – the more authoritative adult in the room. When we did interact more extensively it was often when I helped other young people with their work. On several occasions George came over and asked me to check his answers – though he was sometimes rebuffed by the other students.~~

To learn more about George I interviewed him twice, once about his behaviour in school (15 January 2015) and once about his prior experiences of education (12 February 2015),

recording both times. I included questions about his background and behaviour in an interview with his maths teacher, as this was the class in which I had observed George most frequently and hence where I had the most complete observational notes. I also interviewed the other teachers in the International programme to check whether they knew anything of George's background (for completeness, as Jake was new to the department). I ran a text search for his name in NVivo (version 10.2.1 ~~for Mae~~) to identify the field notes in which he appeared. The field notes and transcribed interviews were coded thematically, an outline produced and used to structure this text, and then re-coded to refine the argument. At two points the data were not sufficiently clear and clarification was sought from the participants.<sup>3</sup>

## **Findings**~~The paper now turns to the results.~~

~~They~~The findings are presented in two sections: the first focuses on the interaction between George and his teacher Jake, showing their different interpretations of how George acts in the classroom. The second section looks closely at George's own understanding of classroom behavioural norms, using extended extracts from interviews in which he describes teacher-student interactions in Ethiopia and at his weekend tuition. Finally, a short discussion section will relate these findings to Pennycook's (2010) model of 'local practice'.

### ***Classroom norms***

George, in interview, referred to instances when he contravened the teacher's expectations:

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Florentina Taylor for her insightful comments on the data.

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**Extract 1, interview with George, 15 January 2015 [4:36-4:52] <sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Transcription conventions: (.) pause of less than one second, - interrupted, (( )) transcriber's comments, > < spoken more quickly, : elongated sound, underlined said with emphasis, ° ° spoken softly, [ ] co-occurring speech.

1 George: Yeah in-er in lesson (.)  
 2 if you know like  
 3 if I know the question (.)  
 4 the teacher (.)  
 5 ((imitates teacher:)) is like he think he y- no  
 6 you don't know this question  
 7 wh-when do you know (.) when do you know  
 8 ((own voice:)) miss I know this question I  
 9 learn there  
 10 ((deeper voice:)) you don't you don't you don't  
 11 know  
 12 just I will teaching you ok?  
 13 >don't worry don't worry<  
 14 ((own voice:)) is like that

In his own account, George is someone who has relevant knowledge to contribute but who is frustrated by the expectation that he be a passive recipient of his teachers' knowledge. He describes times when the teacher thinks he doesn't know the answer, but he feels that he does. In those situations he calls out, 'Miss, I know ~~the~~this question' (line 8), claiming the ~~public space of the classroom~~attention of teacher and classmates. In his telling, this is met with rebuttal: 'you don't know', 'I will teaching you' (lines 10-12). Denied ~~access to the front stage (Goffman 1956)~~recognition of his knowledge, he invokes another learning environment ('I learn there', lines 8-9). It's not clear where this is, or even if it represents a specific location, but ~~we~~I do know that he attended classes in Ethiopia and is involved in other classrooms at the weekend where he studies material related to his course. He does not appear to pick

up on the discursive norms of the classroom, but they are sufficiently familiar for him to impersonate: in lines 5-7 and 10-13 he uses different voices to imitate the teachers telling him that he doesn't know the answer.

George's teacher, Jake, is well aware of this difference of opinion. He mentioned in interview that the level of maths is 'probably too easy' for George but still comments on his behaviour when I asked 'what is he like?':

**Extract 2, interview with Jake, 13 February 2015 [23:44-24:48]**

1 Jake: OK so he ca:n (1) e:r  
2 be a bit too enthusiastic  
3 he's always very enthusiastic but then he:  
4 e::rm probably is unaware of kind of (1)  
5 how to behave in a classroom and (.)  
6 that sort of thing  
7 he's (.) very demanding  
8 almost immature in a way  
9 ~~((ten lines omitted))~~  
10 ~~it's (.) er~~  
11 ~~yeah it's kind of he wants a lot of attention~~  
12 ~~all of the time e:r (1)~~  
13 ~~which is~~  
14 ~~yeah~~  
15 ~~you want people to (.) get a bit more mature~~  
16 ~~and not have~~  
17 ~~have that need~~

18 | ~~or that constant need.~~

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19 RS: do you know if he's been to school much before

20 I'm not sure what his background is

21 Jake: I don't (.) no

22 I haven't really spoken to him very much o:r

23 loo:ked in his file

24 I wouldn't know where to find that information

25 I guess I'd have to speak to other teachers

26 which I (.) I haven't done

27 RS: fair enough (.)

28 I jus- >I thought<

29 cos you said that u:m

30 he wasn't sure about

31 how to behave in a classroom I wondered if you

32 had any sort of a-

33 Jake: yeah it's-

34 that's yeah that sounds like a

35 yeah a:: possibility to me cos

36 | yeah it could well be something like that

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Jake's view of George strongly contrasts George's own description of himself. Rather than being someone with relevant contributions to make, is seen as being too 'enthusiastic' (lines 2-3) to the point of being 'very demanding' and 'almost immature' (lines 7-8). His contributions are interpreted not as valid elements of classroom interaction but as a lack of knowledge about the norms of classroom behaviour (line 5). There is an implicit contrast to other students, but Jake pauses

frequently as he describes George, searching for the words that describe what sets him apart ('kind of', 'that sort of thing', lines 4, 6). There does not appear to be an obvious cause for his behaviour, but when prompted Jake felt it could reflect a lack of schooling in his past (lines 24-27). Jake's account of George's classroom behaviour is in keeping with George's impersonation of a (nameless and possibly composite) teacher-figure in the previous extract. In both cases, George wants to interact publicly with his teacher and to make contributions to the teacher-led interactions of the classroom. Where George describes teachers who shut down exchanges that he initiates (lines 10-13, extract 1),

~~George emerges as a student who is keen to be heard. He is 'very demanding' (line 7) and 'wants a lot of attention, all of the time' (lines 10-11); Jake seems to see this-his contributions as demands for an unequal share of the teacher's attention, as placing unreasonable demands on him.~~

~~George's use of the public space of the classroom cast as his 'constant need' and linked to a lack of maturity (lines 8, 14-17), an undesirable trait ('you want people to get a bit more mature', line 14). George is very 'enthusiastic' but this is taken as a sign that he is 'unaware of [...] how to behave in a classroom' (lines 1-5). There is an implicit contrast to other students, but Jake pauses frequently as he describes George, searching for the words that describe what sets him apart ('kind of', 'that sort of thing', 'which is ... yeah', lines 4, 6, 10, 12-13). There does not appear to be an obvious cause for his behaviour, but when prompted Jake felt it could reflect a lack of schooling in his past (lines 27-35).~~

Jake's perspective is a particularly valuable one. This is his first year teaching (he was completing his post-training qualifying year in the school at the time of the research)

and he takes only one class each week with the International programme students. Some of the hesitation he shows can perhaps be attributed to the fact that he was still getting to grips with the procedures and institutional knowledge of the school, perhaps aware that I was also talking with the other teachers and consciously adopting the departmental stance, perhaps working from his experiences with students further back on his own trajectory. Significantly, this relative newcomer still describes George in very similar terms to his more experienced colleagues. There is no obvious gap in how the different teachers describe George's engagement with the classroom. He is enthusiastic, diligent and working at slightly above the level of the class. For some reason, though, he does not perform according to the discursive norms of the classrooms. ~~We turn now to George's own account.~~

### *George's narration of his own education*

The behavioural and linguistic norms of George's classes at Pine Wood do not immediately replace the behaviours and attitudes that he has developed over long periods of formal education in Ethiopia. This section presents George in his own words, using extracts from interviews where he describes his schooling across three settings and two continents. This will establish more firmly the expectations, behavioural routines and ~~routine~~ knowledge that he carries with him into his South London secondary school.

His education in Ethiopia, as he describes it, was broadly comparable to that of a mainstream secondary student in the UK and covered a range of subjects, from maths and science to social studies. In contrast to his teacher's perception of him as someone who 'doesn't know how to behave' in the classroom (extract 2, above) he shows a

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clear understanding of what was expected at his school in Ethiopia. The extract below is taken from a longer interview in which he describes his classes there:

**Extract 3, interview with George, 12 February 2015 [7:52-8:26]**

1 RS: so the the (.) students would help each other? or  
2 the teacher would help the students  
3 George: first the teacher helping the student  
4 and after that the student is not quite li:ke (.)  
5 the student don't understand  
6 like the teacher is (let's) do this do this do  
7 this when he is co- when the first pair is li-  
8 if you in the- the pair is finished  
9 the student he just revise  
10 ((different voice:)) hi how are you (.) yeah  
11 ((normal voice:)) then is like break time o:r  
12 like in break time o:r like lunchtime  
13 ((different voice:)) do you hey  
14 | I have a maths lesson I don't know how to do this  
15 | can you help me or ((unclear))

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Here, George builds up a detailed picture of his role as a student in Ethiopia, and brings it to life by taking on the voices of participants to illustrate the scene. In the retelling he describes the practices of schooling he is familiar with, and how he re-localised them in the South London school. The teacher is the first point of call in the classroom: 'helping the student' (line 3) and setting appropriate work where the

student has difficulties ('do this [and] do this', line 6). Although this appears to be a very directive and teacher-centred pedagogy, pupils are expected to remain focused in lessons even when the teacher is not directly attending to them (when 'the pair is finished' the students 'just revise', lines 8-9) and at break-times they turn to each other first for help (lines 11-15).

The role that his Ethiopian teachers expect him to play appears entirely transparent to George:

**Extract 4 Interview with George, 12 February 2015 [9:04-9:29]**

1 RS: so (.) did the teacher i:n erm  
2 Ethiopia (.) did the teacher say (.) erm  
3 don't put your hand up so much (.) wait wait  
4 George: yeah is like  
5 you just respect the classroom >it's like<  
6 if no talking (.)  
7 is no talking  
8 you just put your hands up (.) then he pick (do  
9 this)  
10 ((different voice:)) what's the answer  
11 ((normal voice:)) he just he pick  
12 if someone is say  
13 the correct answer  
14 he just like oh good o:r (.) he clap something

I asked George if he was told off for putting his hand up in class, something that I had observed several times in his London classroom. He did not answer directly, instead telling me that it was a matter of ‘respect’ (line 5) to wait your turn: if the teacher wants the class to be quiet, then it’s ‘no talking’ (lines 6-7). His teachers in both countries appear to have similar expectations, but the behaviour norms differ significantly. In Ethiopia he appears to find the cues more transparent: ~~and told to wait to give others a turn. He told me that it was simply a matter of ‘respect’ (line 5): if the teacher wants the class to be quiet, then it’s ‘no talking’ (lines 6-7).~~ Pupils pupils are expected to raise their hands and – if they are picked and offer the correct answer – are rewarded with public recognition (‘he clap’, lines 8-14). This is not applause or excessive praise, but rather a sign that his contribution was successful and appreciated. In his London classroom these routines are not used, and he struggles to be recognised as a legitimate and successful student.

George demonstrates a clear understanding of classroom norms (though they differ from those in his London maths class) that suggests extensive experience of formal education. The following extract continues directly from the previous one, and shows that the teachers’ expectations of the pupils are equally predictable:

**Extract 5 — Interview with George, 12 February 2015 [9:30–10:31]**

1 RS: ~~o::k~~  
2 ~~and which is more difficult~~  
3 ~~Ethiopia (.) maths o:r (.)~~  
4 George: ~~Ethiopia is~~  
5 ~~the English is hard~~  
6 RS: ~~yeah~~

7 ~~George: the social social study is hard and~~  
8 ~~another time you know I'm not I'm no speak~~  
9 ~~English very well (.)~~  
10 ~~is like (2)~~  
11 ~~I staying long in Ethiopia but >is like< (.)~~  
12 ~~I remember that I know how to speak English but~~  
13 ~~>is like<~~  
14 ~~some word >is like< too hard and (.) >if like<~~  
15 ~~you know I'll show you~~  
16 ~~in Ethiopian like mmm (.)~~  
17 ~~Ethiop (.) the (.) the (.)~~  
18 ~~what's it called~~  
19 ~~is a book~~  
20 ~~is like English book~~  
21 ~~°do you remember in the°~~  
22 ~~°in English book°~~  
23 ~~like social study book (.) is is long~~  
24 ~~you need to understand what says (.)~~  
25 ~~then you need to add more~~  
26 ~~>is like<~~  
27 ~~if you get if you understand what they're~~  
28 ~~saying (.)~~  
29 ~~what is this Miss what is this Miss~~  
30 ~~you just keep learning~~  
31 ~~then you just writing~~  
32 ~~then you do presentation is more like (1)~~

~~is good~~

~~As he says, the work may be ‘hard’ and the textbooks ‘long’ but ‘you need to understand’ and then ‘add more’ to your knowledge (lines 4-5, 7, 23-25). George shows that asking questions (‘Miss what is this Miss’, line 29) is an important part of acquiring knowledge (‘you keep learning’, line 30) and leads to public acknowledgement of his success (‘then you do presentation is more like ... is good’, lines 32-33). George, here, seems to articulate clear strategies for being successful as a student.~~

At several points, he is explicit about the interaction of different elements within one learning context, —such as curriculum, peers and homework:

**Extract 55 Interview with George, 12 February 2015 [7:08-7:49]**

1 George: you get like (.) hard student  
 2 that is like  
 3 ((imitates voice:)) George >come on come on  
 4 come on< ((own voice:)) and I’m helping  
 5 in Ethiopia yeah  
 6 if you (.) if you are (.) if you you know (.)  
 7 if you like (.) if you’re good at maths you  
 8 just have (.) you know like  
 9 one five  
 10 one student he help °one° five student  
 11 one p- one student like one person help five  
 12 student like

13 e:very Saturday Sunday (.)  
14 if I were good at maths (and) my  
15 my friend he comes like  
16 this this student I will help then you give you  
17 go office then every day  
18 please help this student  
19 and you just like friendly (.) you just like  
20 yeah it's really nice

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As he describes his experiences of schooling he moves seamlessly between different settings. The reference to 'Saturday Sunday' (line 13), for example, is ambiguous; I ask him immediately following this extract whether he was talking about London or Ethiopia and he said the latter, but he also attends private classes every Saturday and Sunday in London. At points he slips into other voices:

He slips into the voice of another, here, exhorting himself to help other students ('George come on come on', lines 3-4), before explaining ; then he explains what he had just told me: . if If you're good at maths you are expected to help a number of other pupils ('one student he help ... five student', line 10). This double voicing may be significant. Blackledge and Creese (2010, drawing on Bakhtin 1968) note that classroom discourse is 'shaped and influenced by the discourse of others' (p. 126). Parody has the capacity to unsettle the 'prevailing truth and established order' (Bakhtin 1986: 10), and here George appears to be moving between voices to draw different encounters from his trajectory into the present moment.

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The reference to 'Saturday Sunday' (line 13) is ambiguous: I ask him immediately following this extract whether he was talking about London or Ethiopia—he said the latter, but he also attends private classes every Saturday and Sunday in London. The two may not be so distant in terms of his experience of schooling. Within the interview he shifts seamlessly between different times, places and speakers; here, he may be describing the commonalities between two settings.

I asked George what some good and bad things about the International programme were:

**Extract 6 — Interview with George, 15 January 2015 [4:05-5:02]**

1 ~~George: good thing is you learn more~~  
2 ~~good thing is you have make friend with new student~~  
3 ~~good thing is you listen the teacher and then you is~~  
4 ~~gonna give answer like (3)~~  
5 ~~bad thing is like some teacher if you make mistakes (.)~~  
6 ~~is like~~  
7 ~~if you play in drama lesson~~  
8 ~~or if you out some teacher he don't (guess) he like you~~  
9 ~~out~~  
10 ~~Sir I'm not out~~  
11 ~~you out don't give him back answer~~  
12 ~~{Sir} I'm not out=~~  
13 ~~RS: [in ]~~  
14 ~~=games in drama lesson?~~  
15 ~~George: yeah in lesson if you know like~~

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16 ~~if I know the question~~  
17 ~~the teacher (.) is like he think you don't know~~  
18 ~~this question~~  
19 ~~wh when do you know~~  
20 ~~when do you know~~  
21 ~~Miss I know this question I learn (then)~~  
22 ~~((deeper voice:)) you don't you don't you don't~~  
23 ~~know~~  
24 ~~just I will teaching you ok~~  
25 ~~don't (worry don't worry) ((normal voice:)) is~~  
26 ~~like that~~  
27 ~~RS: so sometimes (.) you've learnt things (.)~~  
28 ~~before~~  
29 ~~George: yep~~  
30 ~~RS: and you have to learn them again at school~~  
31 ~~George: yep~~  
32 ~~((quietly:)) I revise like~~

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~~An important resource in his existing learning routines is the teacher, and George is dissatisfied when his behaviour does not evoke the response he expects. Here we can see that, in the absence of familiar routines, George falls back on what he knows. There is an understated anxiety audible when he describes how his teachers here respond differently to his attempts to claim a more powerful, knowledgeable position for himself. He complains that the teacher tells him he is 'out' (line 10) when he isn't — a reference to the games that the teacher uses to warm up at the beginning of every~~

drama lesson. The aim of these games is to relax the students, to loosen their muscles and raise their enthusiasm: they are fun and competitive, but half the fun is losing. This is not an arena where students are expected to compete for the teacher's attention, and George's attempt to do so is treated as answering back. He expands on this by giving an example from another subject: when he thinks he knows the answer because he has studied outside class ('I know this question I learn', line 22), he is told to wait for the teacher to lead the class through the material. Teachers, here, do not respond in the way he expects, and this causes problems for him. Interestingly, his classroom routines take on a new slant when he is required to study material that he feels he already knows: in Ethiopia, he was expected to 'revise' (line 33) when he was ahead of the class; here, he talks about revising in class when he has already done the work and has time to kill.

## Discussion

The research site of this study was an unusual one for the UK context: a full-year ~~withdrawal~~ transition programme which brought migrant students together into highly multilingual, highly diverse classrooms. Students who spoke different languages and had experience of different (or no) formal education settings were not peripheral to this programme; they were central to its purpose. Even with this focus on the needs of migrant students, though, George struggled to adapt (to) the behavioural norms of the classroom. This points to the ongoing relevance of young migrants' earlier learning and raises questions about how we conceptualise and organise their education in this country. This raises points about the way we conceptualise and enact education for young migrants, and how such students draw on their previous experiences to engage

~~with their new classrooms.~~ The discussion is grouped into two sections, on ‘trajectory’ and ‘relocalising learning’, and is followed by some brief notes on how it could be developed further.

### *Rethinking ‘trajectory’*

This paper introduced a specific use of ‘trajectory’ as an analytical construct, suggesting that earlier experiences provide the lens through which young migrants make sense of their classrooms in the here-and-now. ~~positing a distinction between the ‘here and now’ of the data and people, places and events that are more distant in time and space.~~ The data have shown how they are connected: George’s expectations of his teachers and peers are heavily influenced by his experiences of teacher-student and student-student interaction in his Ethiopian classrooms. His ~~People and places that are more distant in time and space are highly relevant in the present: his~~ frustration at the way a teacher responds to him, for example, seems to draw on how he thinks teachers *should* behave, and do in other settings. ~~These connections can be temporally concurrent as well as sequential, for example when he tries to bring learning from other settings into the classroom (e.g. in extract 1, lines 8-9). At other times the relation is historically linear, such as when he seems to transpose peer interaction from Ethiopia directly to London (e.g. extract 5).~~

George’s use of voicing is particularly intriguing. It appears to be a strategy for bridging the differences between his trajectory and his interlocutors: if our earlier experiences provide the lens through which we make sense of the present, then his evocative or parodic voicing of others allows him to bring them into the interaction and create common ground between us. It is also an example of a contact zone, which

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in Pratt's (1989, 1991) original conception were spaces where dominant and subordinate groups interact. Contact zones emphasise subordinate discourses (such as George's, in the context our interview) because they complicate 'notions of static, fixed, bounded sociocultural wholes' (Singh and Doherty 2004, 12). By using different voices George neither has to take on a more expert role (to tell me about classroom norms in Ethiopia), nor does he have to accept a subordinate role (he can recount his teacher's telling off, in extract one, without accepting its validity). He is also able to step away from essentialised roles such as 'student' or 'Ethiopian': he brings together different roles as he speaks, moving between different times and places to create a compelling account of himself. In Pratt's (1991: 35) terms it is autoethnographic, involving only a 'selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms' of the dominant group.

~~Rather than seeing each context as a relatively separate stage in his personal or educational history, the 'trajectory' approach allows each data point to be plotted on a broader trajectory and connections drawn between them. This opens the analysis to a broader range of time-space orientations. There is a methodological underpinning to this approach: the ethnographic combination of long-term observation and repeated interviews is particularly well suited to collecting the types of data that can be used to reconstruct a trajectory. Closer attention to the performance itself can deepen the analysis. This also helps to validate the claims made from the research: where the connections across a trajectory are relatively few, weaker claims can be supported. Stronger claims can be made at the nexus points where connections cluster.~~

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### ***Relocalising practice***

This approach fits very well with Pennycook's (2010) notion of 'local practice'. This sees language use as a performance of specific norms, each of which is temporally,

spatially and socially situated. The 'trajectory' approach allows ~~at the analyst to~~ more deeply historicise d analysis of such performances, bringing in the granularity of Pennycook's work on the individual elements of – say – a rap performance (see Pennycook 2007) and the broader scope of transnational migration. George's behaviour in the classroom was seen as inappropriately 'needy' and 'demanding' by his teacher: ~~'needy' and 'demanding'~~. George himself described it differently: his understanding of classrooms is based on a particular arrangement of teacher-student, and student-student and student resource behavioural norms. He performs according to these norms in London, but the local expectations are different and mark his behaviour as non-conformist. In Pennycook's (2010, 43) terms this 'is not only repeated social activity involving language, but is also, through its relocalization in space and time, the repetition of difference.' ~~George describes historically, spatially and socially situated ways of being a student—and describes them as successful in Ethiopia. He repeats these performances with minimal adaptation in his London classroom and they are less successful: his teachers describe him as having been bullied in his first months in the school, and he was not making a significantly better impression at the time these data were collected. This repeated display of difference may have been a significant part of his difficulties in the classroom, leading his teacher to suggest that he was 'probably unaware of ... how to behave in a classroom' in the UK. It may be relevant that these difficulties appeared to lessen over the course of the fieldwork, either as George learned how to behave or as he found new ways of meeting his goals.~~

### *Developing the analytical ~~model~~ approach*

There ~~is~~ ~~are~~ ~~another~~ ~~two~~ way of seeing this behaviour, not just as one participant's *adapting to* the norms of the classroom but also his *adapting of* those norms. George's influence on his peers falls outside the scope of the present article, but elsewhere in the broader data-set there are examples of his ~~peers~~ ~~classmates~~ using their arguments with him as an opportunity to reposition themselves in the group and to ~~reclaim~~ ~~claim~~ legitimacy in the public discursive space of the classroom. This leads to a broader theoretical argument: that the 'trajectory' analysis is not limited to a focus on individual students. It sees nominally bounded spaces such as classrooms as 'contact zones' (Pratt 1989, 1991; Canagarajah 1997, 2013), complex and power-laden encounters in which prior experience is brought to bear on present interaction. It is possible to narrow the framing of the analysis to focus on that contact, and show how the participants renegotiate their trajectories by introducing elements of their prior experience to the interaction and using it to reposition themselves within the group. This can be seen in George's use of different voices (and is explored further in Sharples forthcoming 2017): his use of different voices brings his experience of schools in Ethiopia and in other classes in London into our interaction. He uses them to reposition himself – not as a pushy student (in extract one, for example), but as someone with legitimate contributions to make.

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~~This leads to a broader theoretical argument: that the 'trajectory' analysis is not limited to a focus on individual students. It sees nominally bounded spaces such as classrooms as 'contact zones' (Pratt 1991, extended by Canagarajah 2013), a locus where individual trajectories intersect. Looking in detail at how multiple trajectories intersected would mean dramatically narrowing the frame of the analysis to focus on a relatively brief interaction, before working outwards along individual trajectories.~~

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## Conclusions

Pennycook (2010, 137) argued that ‘the global may be conceived in terms of the co-occurrence of the local in time and space’, and this points to the implications for educational policy and practice. In short, what this paper has attempted to demonstrate is that behind a young person who came across to his teachers as irritating and unfamiliar with the norms of schooling is a young man with very specific experiences of education. Where he struggles is in recognising what has changed: without that key, no amount of calling out answers or raising hands will help him to succeed on the terms that his school sets. We often think of young migrants in terms of where they have come from or what challenges stand in their way. They are ‘refugees’, or ‘language learners’, or ‘seeking better opportunities’. We rarely think of the minute, daily processes of ‘making sense’, of bringing resources to bear from different times and places and ‘re-localising’ them to the here-and-now. Through a study of how one learner, George, young person draws on his own experiences of schooling, this paper has argued for an analytical approach that places situated, local performances of sameness and difference on a broader migration trajectory. This study has sought to extend Pennycook’s notion of ‘local practice’ so that it can be used in the analysis of young migrants’ experiences in education. There is further work to be done in developing and refining such an argument, but the analysis also points to implications for practice. Where students appear to be lost, needy or unable to function effectively, this research suggests that they may be looking for ways to be effective learners. They may just be missing the nuanced code by which particular classrooms work. That is

complex knowledge but it can be broken down and explained – both analytically and in the classroom.

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