Children, Religion and Social Capital;

Bonding and Bridging in Multi-faith Urban Neighbourhoods

Abstract

The much debated concept of social capital, although beset with definitional and measurement problems, nonetheless provides a useful lens through which to analyse issues of interpersonal relationships and social cohesion in diverse urban communities. To date the literature reveals relatively limited application of social capital theories to the world of children, or to the area of religious diversity. Here an attempt is made to work within a theoretical framework of different types of capital operating in various social fields suggested by Bourdieu, which allows us to see children as social agents operating in a complex social and religious environment.

This paper, based on some recently completed research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on Children's Perspectives on Believing and Belonging, discusses the social networks and social capital resources of pre-adolescent children in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in two English cities. Data drawn from in depth interviews with nearly 100 children, aged between 9 and 11 years, from Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian backgrounds, supplemented by classroom data gathering and participant observation in the schools and neighbourhoods allow us to address these questions from the children's own viewpoint.

The research reported here shows how for many children, religious affiliation and involvement in the activities of local religious institutions, plays a major role in shaping their social networks and their use of time and space. It reveals a complex interplay of religious and ethnic identities, children from all faith backgrounds who vary in the level of their involvement and commitment to organised or personal religion, and lifestyles in which religious organisations continue to play a significant part for the majority of children. While religion in itself is not necessarily a barrier to the development of friendships and bridging social capital, the strong bonding associated with religion in neighbourhoods divided along ethno-religious lines may make it difficult for children to sustain cross community relationships.

Children and Social Capital;

The role of Local Religious Institutions in Urban Neighbourhoods

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Introduction

Among the most popular concepts in the social policy discourse of contemporary "Third Way" politicians and commentators are social cohesion and social capital. Although these are not everyday terms in the speech of 10 and 11 year old children, the life experiences of those who live in urban neighbourhoods of ethnic and religious diversity are full of interactions which relate to them. For many children faith affiliation and participation in the life of religious institutions is an important part of their identity and lifestyle, and arguably shapes the nature and quality of their social networks, their bonds of trust with others, and the values and norms which shape their behaviour. It is this area of children's lives which was the subject of the recently completed research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation led by the author, and this paper is a reflection on the findings, in terms of their importance for theories of, and policies centring on social capital.

Social Capital and Other Theories

The introduction of the term social capital goes back nearly a century (Hanifan 1920.. but its emergence in social theory owes much to the work of two social theorists Bourdieu (1988) and Coleman (1990). While the former locates social capital in the context of several different types of capital, (economic, human, cultural etc.) which are distributed unequally between individuals, classes and groups in society and which tend to be used in competition and conflict, Coleman sees social capital in a more functionalist perspective as the networks which form the bedrock of social cohesion.

The popularisation of such ideas and policy implementations owe much to the work of Putnam whose studies of voluntary organisations in Italy (1993), and of social trends in the USA (1995,2000) follow Coleman's approach. For Putnam and his numerous followers the key task is an empirical one of devising and applying measuring instruments which will allow reliable comparisons between societies and over time. Putnam's definition of social capital as

*The features of social organisation such as **networks, norms and trust** that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit'* (Putnam, 1993).

scarcely helps in the task of measurement as it contains a mixed basket of concepts. Putnam's recent division of social capital into bonding, bridging (horizontally across equal status groups) and linking (vertically between groups with differential status and power) is a helpful analytic development although it hardly simplifies the measurement problem. Furthermore it is not always clear in the literature whether measurement is designed to be applied at the level of the individual or the community as a whole although Putnam himself tends to favour the macro level approach. Our perspective in this paper is that precise measurement of social capital is an impossible and fruitless task but that the analysis of social networks and social processes that lead

to bonding, bridging and linking is a viable empirical enterprise and throws useful light on issues of social cohesion and conflict.

Despite the conceptual and empirical problems with social capital and arguments about whether certain forms of social capital are beneficial (Portes and Landolt (1996) there have been numerous applications of the idea in work; e.g. on neighbourhoods and community studies (Forrest & Kearns, 2001), the voluntary sector (Begum, H. and National Council For Voluntary Organisations (2003), Jochum, V. and. National Council for Voluntary Organisations. (2003)..), surveys on citizenship and participation issues (Home Office 2003) and across the globe on development themes. (see world bank website (last accessed 20.1.05) at http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/index.htm)

Perhaps the most significant attempt to discuss the possibility of using Social capital theory applied to the lives of children is that of Morrow (1999). In that paper she offers a comprehensive and critical review of the work of the main theorists of social capital. Broadly speaking she rejects the tradition of family studies based on Coleman's approach on the grounds that it contributes to a deficit (and gendered) theory of social capital, particularly directed towards female lone parent households. Putnam's macro level attempts at social capital measurement are scarcely relevant to Morrow's or our own concerns, and are in any case linked with the discredited myth of "community lost" (Wellman 1979). Instead Morrow suggests moving forward *"by coupling Bourdieu's original formulation of social capital as in relation with other forms of capital and as rooted in the practices of everyday life, with a view of children as having agency (albeit constrained); thus linking micro-social and macro-social structural factors."*. Morrow's approach resonates with our own in stressing the child's everyday experience as a reflexive social actor in the context of numerous social networks and institutions, rather than as a "future adult in becoming" or the property of the significant adults (usually parents) in his or her life.

The popularity of social capital theory has not escaped the notice of religious activists, for example the web site of the Church Urban Fund carries a substantial discussion at http://www.cuf.org.uk/resource/issues/social_capital.htm   (last accessed 20.1.05). Academic discussions of religion and social capital are harder to find but include Greeley's paper from the USA (1997),. Bacon's study of Northern Ireland (2004), and my own work on East London (Smith 1998, 2001, 2002). It is sometimes hard to distinguish analysis from advocacy for a greater recognition of the work of faith based groups in these studies. However a more critical edge may emerge from work in progress funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on (Furbey personal communication 2004), where questions are being asked as to whether faith based bonding helps or hinders wider bridging and linking forms of social capital. From the perspective of this paper Bourdieu again proves helpful through his concept of distinct social fields. Indeed he posits the notion of specifically religious capital, strongly linked to a distinct religious field in which specific religious institutions play a dominant role. He argues that in the transition to modernity religious capital came to be monopolised by a small group of religious professionals closely associated with major institutions, while in contemporary society, which others have typified as a "spiritual hypermarket", ordinary individuals have more chance to accumulate their own stocks of religious capital. For this perspective on Bourdieu I am indebted to Lene Kuhl's conference paper (2004) which discusses Bourdieu in the context of the

integration of religious minorities into Scandinavian societies. Clearly this approach is of relevance here as we consider how children acquire and use social and religious capital in religious and other social fields, as they lead lives which are partially constrained by adult dominated institutions and religious traditions, but in which they are capable as free agents of choosing or rejecting associations with both other people and a variety of religious world views.

One other area of social theory is essential as a building block in our analysis of children's religious life and social networks, which is a sociology of ethnicity/ies and identity/ies. Our approach draws on the tradition of ethnic boundary processes first suggested in anthropology by Barth (1969)…and of social categorisation advanced in social psychology by Tajfel (1982)… In the context of religion these theories have been well used and adapted for example by Jacobsen in her study of Muslim young people in East London (1998) and by Nesbitt in her work with Hindu / Sikh children in Coventry (1991). The major significance of this is to avoid reifiying or essentialising any ethnic, cultural or religious group as fixed or primordial, but rather to examine the way children become involved in social processes which in particular contexts subjectively assign themselves, or others ascribe them to particular collectivities. A consequence of this is to reject any simplistic "world religions" approach which suggests that because someone "belongs" to Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism or Christianity, she or he will believe, practice or interact with others in a prescribed manner. As we shall see in the setting of multi-faith schools and neighbourhoods children engage in a complex pattern of "identity work", interethnic dynamics and creative religious activity, albeit constrained by a framework of codified religious traditions and faith based institutions.

Some key questions in our research

Our research aimed to understand issues about the social significance of religion for children by examining accounts and perspectives across different areas of their lives. Here we will concentrate on what children told us about

- their understanding of religious/ethnic identity
- their religious observance and practice of spirituality
- their involvement in local religious institutions (including the school) in contexts of formal worship and learning.
- the role of religious organisations as a social resource, and as a place for leisure activities
- their social networks in school and outside, friendship and conflict with other children

Finally we will discuss three key questions suggested by the theoretical perspective that has been set out.

> How do children resolve the tension in religious and social life between their own sense of agency and the obvious constraints imposed by adult institutions?

For children how far is religious capital and the religious field distinguishable from social capital and the overall pattern of children's social lives?

What role does religion play in fostering bonding between children of similar religious backgrounds and assisting or hindering bridging with children of other backgrounds?

Research Method

This study, carried out in 2003 involved just over 100 children aged 9 -11, from a wide range of religious backgrounds, in three schools in two multi-ethnic inner city neighbourhoods classed as being in the worst 10% of areas measured by the government's 2004 index of multiple deprivation. Schools 1 and 2 in the North of England were church primary schools (the first Anglican, the second Roman Catholic), with an intake including about 40% ethnic minority children, predominantly of Gujerati heritage, roughly equally divided between Hindus and Muslims. School 2 in London, was a secular community school serving a diverse population where ethnic minorities formed a substantial overall majority. The school intake was very diverse with children with family roots in all the main countries and regions of South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.. The children involved gave a good cross sectional representation of the population of the neighbourhoods around their schools. However, this study is small in scale and is not statistically representative of children in the UK, or even of those living in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that the findings are likely to be valid only for children living in the particular local contexts we studied and for the specific religious and ethnic diversity mixes these represented.

Access to children involved a series of school visits by members of a research team, who were diverse in their gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds.. In school 3 fieldwork included an extended presence of two researchers for three days a week over the final half term of the school year. Using in depth interviews, mostly with pairs of children, supported by a range of other classroom based data gathering methods, such as classroom surveys, network mapping exercises, out of school diaries, and group discussions, an extensive corpus of data was gathered.

What the children said…

Religious and Ethnic Identities

The children in our sample, with few exceptions, were willing to identify themselves as affiliated to a religion. Of 102 children who completed our classroom survey 40% identified themselves and their family as Muslim, 35% as Christian, 10% as Hindu, 4% as Sikh, 3% as other or some mixture and 8% as of no religion. It is hard to assess how far these high levels of religious identification were influenced by the research being introduced as "Friends, Food and Faith", but it seems plausible that this focus gave religion an unusual salience in the conversations. It also seems likely that figures

would be lower in other more affluent and less diverse locations than the multi-ethnic inner urban neighbourhoods in which the project worked.

All the Muslim children we talked to accepted and affirmed their identity as Muslims and for a large number of them the religious dimension of their identity appeared paramount and a matter of pride. At least three or four interviews began rather like this, before the interviewer could say a word.

> My name it is J……. and I live in (street) In this town.. I'm a Muslim and my religion is Islam. I go to mosque everyday, we have five prayers a day…
> Muslim Boy, school 3

However, there are variations in the extent of Islamic practices, and definitions of Islamic identity. For example two highly observant Muslim girls discussed (with a female Muslim interviewer who was herself wearing a scarf) markers of a "proper" Muslim female, thus.:

> *What do you like about them [friends]?*
> they wear scarf like me. And they play cricket and rounders and basketball.
> *So does it make a difference whether someone wears a scarf or not to be your friend?*
> Yeah.
> *Why?*
> Because when some people don't wear scarves they don't really act like a Muslim.
> Muslim girl, school 2

While the identity of the category Muslim is relatively clear cut, the category Hindu is harder to define. We discovered that some children who introduced themselves as Hindus, participate in Christian activities including Sunday mass attendance, as well as in Hindu rituals at home and temple. Hindu children recognised that there were variations in the extent of religious practice between and within families, and often suggested the older generation was more religious than they were. One boy for example told us his grandmother was always "acting like a priest". The term Sikh covers only a handful of children in our sample but again is problematic. At least one child told us her family took part in worship both at the Gurudwara and a local Hindu temple. A Sikh boy who gave a detailed account of the identity markers of the Sikh Khalsa (the uncut hair, comb, bangle, dagger and underpants…. often referred to as the 5 Ks), was explicitly aware of the historical links between the religions, telling us that Guru Nanak was actually a Hindu, and mentioning that Sikhs celebrate Diwali. Yet, the same boy and his Sikh interview partner (who was his cousin) also talked of their own religious identity as contrasting and sometimes conflicting with that of Muslims who were the numerical majority in the locality thus…

> And some Muslims even they say bad things about our religion sometimes.. just because there are less of us and more of them..

Somehow I can't take it... I shall just beat em up...I really can't take it...

For individual children of Indian heritage religious identity, especially at the family level can be even more complicated. For example a girl who defined herself as a Hindu said,

> I don't go to Hindu classes, just like once in a week I go to a Gurudwara. And I have been to church with my Auntie. ....sometimes I go temple, and Gurudwara with my other Auntie.
> *So your Auntie is Sikh?*
> Yeah. And my other Auntie, the one that's Christian, when I go to her house, ...I go to the Church with her on Sundays.
>   Hindu girl; school 2

The term "Christian" is even more difficult to define with any consistency. For children from a white British (or Irish) family background it is a default term, which is often applied to them by Muslim or Hindu children, by the school authorities and sometimes by themselves, regardless of whether they or their families belong to, or attend a church, or believe anything that is recognisably Christian doctrine.

The children who said they were of "no religion" were all white and in school 1. Yet even here there was some ambiguity as some who had first said they had "no religion" then said they believed the basic Christian teachings about God and Jesus and even that they attended church activities.

> I believe in all the Christian things, but I don't really go to church or nothing. I pray ....I pray at school and everything, I don't like pray of my free will.. .....I used to go to Brownies when I was about seven, and I go to this thing in St .... Church...... I go to a club. ... it's like when you learn about God and things in a fun way..

>   girl "no religion"; school 1

In contrast among the Black (African or Caribbean heritage) children in our sample (apart from two Muslims with African family backgrounds), all called themselves Christians (about 10 in the classroom survey), and all seven who were interviewed told us they were involved with their families in active membership of a church.

Religious identity often overlapped or became confused with ethnicity. There were references to other children "talking Muslim", or "speaking "Hindu" (rather than Hindi, Gujarati or Punjabi) and children who described their own religion as Indian rather than Hindu. Ethnic identity was often described as far more complex than the simple major census categories of White, Black and Asian. For example a Muslim girl in London talked about a distinction and behaviour she described as "racist" between those (Muslims) who are fluent in English and those who have a distinct overseas accent (perhaps denoting recent migration).

A: …… Only sometimes, you know when you're Pakistani, and most of the people just say you're Freshi ……
Interviewer: What's that
A: It's like they go that you're like typical and can't speak English properly, all that stuff. And they be like racist to you.
                    Muslim girl school 2..

Religious Understanding And Practice Of Spirituality

Working from what children told us about their religious beliefs and practices we found it helpful to construct a fivefold typology of children in terms of their patterns of religious identification, practice and belief, although not every child could be unambiguously placed in a single category.

Highly observant: these children would describe their lives as significantly shaped by their religion. They are likely to be heavily involved in the practices and institutions of their religion and quite strongly committed to the beliefs and values they have been taught. In our study almost all children who could be described as highly observant were Muslim. Their lives involved daily lessons at the local mosque and many aspects of domestic and public life which were shaped by religious and moral codes.

The pattern of daily ritual for which many of the children described involves a fivefold observance of prayer (Namaz), which can take place in any suitable room or open space. Many men and boys choose to use a local mosque, while females usually perform this at home. Before each prayer time each believer goes through a process of ritual washing (wudhu), and this is also required when touching or reading the Holy Quran. There is also a preference to change into suitable Islamic clothes before performing prayers.

Two boys described their evening routine in detail;

> I just go home.. and go upstairs and get changed into my mosque clothes, and I have to do this thing called "wusu" yeah..
> **What does that mean?**
> **You have to wash your face and hands..**
> You have to wash your hands three times.. then you have to gargle your mouth three times.. then get your little finger and do that, put water up your nose, then get your little finger and do that, clean your mouth… then you wash your face three times, then you get your middle finger and your other finger and you go over your head like that and you go behind your ears then you wipe it on your neck.. and if you have washed your arms three times both of them and your legs, and both feet three times.. you put this clothes thing on ..called "chuppa" and you put a hat on.. a mosque hat on.. and you have this thing called Holy Quran and you take that with you to mosque, and you go and pray for two hours, then I come back and I go to my room or I play out for half an hour…..

Two Muslim boys, school 3

Among the few non-muslim children whose religious observance approached that of the most observant Muslims was a Christian girl (from a Black African background) whose parents were very involved in the leadership of a small evangelical church. She and her sister spent much time in the church, were involved in Sunday school, choir and prayer meetings and clearly practiced their religion at home. She told us she had a personal faith and that she had recently made a public commitment to the church through believer's baptism.

> But (my sister and I) just got saved.. And then we had to get baptised…
> ……….
> *How would you explain to me what getting saved is?*
> When you… have given you life to Jesus… and you listen to him.. And you try to do all the good deeds.. But you try to listen to the Bible.. And do what it says in the Bible…
> > Christian Girl school 3

Observant : Such children describe religious observance as playing a compulsory, significant and regular part in their lives. Typically the adults in their lives are regular attenders at a place of worship and expect the children to come with them. These children usually accept the religion's teachings and practices although they may find some or all of it boring or an imposition. For example a Catholic girl told us:

> Sundays, it's the most boring say of the week.
> *Why is it boring?*
> I go Church,…… the priest go on. …………………. we don't even know what he's talking about most of the time.
> > Christian Girl; school 2

Among Muslims, whose daily schedules often involved several hours of religious activity there were some who made envious comparisons with the freer lives of classmates
> *If you had your own choice…completely had your own freedom what would you do after school..?*
> **Play out…**
> It's OK for Christians…
> *You think it's Ok for Christians do you?*
> **They can play outside…**
> > Two Muslim Boys ; school 3

The Hindu and Sikh children we talked to, all seemed familiar with religious activities at Temples and Gurudwaras but for the most part did not follow as frequent a pattern of attendance as the Muslims or church going Christians. The children said they had a fair degree of freedom to drop in and out of the temple ceremonies as they pleased, they could sit quietly with the adults or go out and chat or "mess about" with their friends, as long as there behaviour was reasonably good and respectful.

> I just go and sit inside the temple …. just you have to sit there and (listen???) but I don't really do that, my mum does that. I go upstairs and talk to my friends and I play inside. ……. I go to my classroom, go and mess about.
>
> <div align="center">Hindu girl school 3</div>

Hindu children might also be involved in, a pattern of domestic ritual observance involving partial fasting, or abstinence from certain foods or activities such as haircuts on specific days.

> ### What sort of religious things do you do at home?
> There is a mini temple in our house… and we even pray there… if we don't have time to go…
> ### So who leads the prayers there? How do you do it? Do you do it individually?
> Individually any time we want.. My dad does it is on the days that I told you when I don't eat meat… Monday
> ### Which are those days you don't eat meat?
> I don't eat… I eat it sometimes.. But Monday Thursday and Saturday.. And we have a day when we have to eat cold food… the food has to be cold…
>
> <div align="center">Hindu Boy school 3</div>

Occasionally Participating: Such children do not get taken or sent to religious activities by their adults, except on rare special occasions, and are unlikely to be well instructed in their religion. They do identify with the religion, may attend voluntarily, without adults, and enjoy benefits such as fun clubs, festivals, feasts and presents. Most of these children were white and nominally Christians, although there were also some Hindus, a few of whom also attended activities of other religions.

The majority of the Christians in this group did not attend Sunday worship on a regular basis but when they did they mostly enjoyed the children's activities that were on offer. In Roman Catholic churches children were likely to attend adult oriented parish mass, in which several of the girls we talked to played a significant role as "servers" dressed in special robes

> We are altar servers
> ### What does that mean?
> **And we help father M...**
> We help father M.. out.. Plus we do christenings and that
> ### So what does that mean … going to church on Sunday?
> Yes
> **I used to go on Saturday is but I have stopped doing it now, because I ain't got time...**
> **.....**
> I do do it.. Sometimes I go just to watch the mass but sometimes father M… needs me to serve, so every time I go I in end up serving every time

Two Catholic girls; school 3

A number of children were choosing or attempting to attend religious activities despite parental indifference, sometimes with the support of another adult relative or sometimes on their own. For example

> I've a bible in my room. My mum won't take me to church though - I want to go to Church
> **You want to go to Church?**
> **I'm allowed to go when - ... I go down to my nan's in [city of N. England] and she'll take me to Church. She doesn't really believe in God but she knows I do, so she'll take me to church sometimes if she's got time, but my mum won't. She says she's got too much work to do**

Implicit Individual Faith: These children's accounts concentrate on religion as the realm of the supernatural and talk about personal spirituality, drawing on faith as a resource through prayer, meditation, rituals etc. They may attend or belong to religious institutions and express a religious affiliation, but these are not essential to their understanding of faith. It was evident from the interviews that some children in this group had an everyday awareness of the presence of the divine. This type included some churchgoing and nominal Christians, a pagan, at least one Sikh, and two Muslim girls whose most significant experience of religion took place in a vernacular tradition of Islam. They gave several extensive accounts of popular stories, beliefs and practices involving ghosts, demons, supernatural events, and exorcism ritual conducted by holy men (pirs).

.Our only pagan respondent, told us in a quite straightforward way that "the Goddess talks to me" and his imaginary friend (who had been listed on his network diagram and already discussed in the interview) also takes part in these spiritual conversations. A number of children from Christian and Hindu backgrounds included God on their network diagrams of important other people in their lives as in the example below

> I've put as closest God.. because he is everywhere...(then) my mum, my dog, my baby sister
>
> Christian boy, school 2

Many children, talked about prayer or meditation as a personal spiritual practice, covering such situations as coping with school work and needing God's help in tests and exams. One girl spoke of seeking divine help when sad

> I'm glad that God is in my life because like say I'm a bit down in the dumps, I'm a bit sad, I can always pray and talk to God ....God's always there for you as well and that's something to hold on to - say if you're like ill or something like that
>
> Christian girl, school 3

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In a similar way one Christian boy spoke of praying daily that he would be helped to keep out of trouble at school, another of prayer about controlling his own difficult behaviour, and a Sikh boy of how meditating on the name of his God was an effective help for getting good marks in a mental maths test.

Not religious : Such children have little interest in or understanding of religion, or experience of it outside of school, and may question or mock those who are religious. All were white children in one school in the North of England.. One conversation involving a non-churchgoing boy (1) and an observant Catholic classmate (2) went like this.

> *Interviewer…. Would you say you believe in God at all?*
> Boy 1   No
> *Interviewer   Not at all.?*
> Boy 1   Yes I do a bit… ….my sister is a muppet.. Do you want to know why… because of Christmas she goes let's say a prayer…
> *Interviewer   What's wrong with that?*
> Boy 1   She is weird.. and I don't know she is weird..
> **Boy 2   Do you say grace before you eat your tea?**
> Boy 1   No (laughter) I did once I said … dub dub, thanks for the grub

Local Religious Institutions : Formal Worship And Learning.

Almost all of the children, whatever their level of observance were impacted in a significant way by the presence of local religious institutions in their neighbourhood. Two of the three schools in the study were in fact church schools, with strong links with a local parish, which meant that the Christian clergy were familiar figures to all the children. In all the schools religious education followed a multi-faith syllabus in which an attempt was made to respect and understand all the varieties of religious experience present in the school and neighbourhood. Even so there were one or two issues where children experienced segregation from their classmates by religion (for example by being excluded from assemblies, or being served halal or vegetarian food at separate tables. In two schools Muslim children felt they were not treated fairly by being required to do music and singing lessons, when the version of Islam they had been taught did not allow singing.

For many children religious institutions played a significant part in providing religious instruction out of school hours. Many spent a lot of spare time attending / participating in religious education groups.

Muslim children typically spent 15 - 20 hours per week involved in religious instruction, and in doing homework for the classes at mosque, or in some cases for a visiting home tutor. Most had begun their attendance at mosque classes at, or even before the age of five, and had steadily moved up through the classes, often taking great pride in their progression. As they got older it was more likely that boys and girls were taught in separate classes. They told us most of the mosques had a system

of tests or examinations, and in some cases ceremonies and public presentations to reward achievement. They described methods of learning which rely heavily on memorizing texts in a language which is not well understood. However, it is clear that children acquired a degree of honour and religious capital from both their classmates and elders though these disciplines of learning. Some children took great pride in their success in these exams.

> we go to the mosque… and eat and stuff.. We go and children do the ceremony call.. Jelsa.. And children take part in it.. And I took part about bonfire night… and it is a speech you learn by heart.. Two or three pages of writing it… you learn by heart and then you say it… you get money for doing it… and then the lesson .. That is when you get the present… and the exam and they tell you the results.. ………The person who comes first gets the best prize… and the second and third get the same prize…
> Muslim girl school 1

In contrast the churchgoing children from Protestant or evangelical communities generally received very low key religious instruction in the context of children's groups running alongside Sunday worship for adults. Mostly they regarded these activities as a fun club for children, with some Bible stories, drawing, and singing thrown in. The most demanding academic activity we heard of was the task of memorising a short Bible verse.

> There was a children's part for like playing… you could go in there but you didn't have to… that's why… like there's a children's part and like a proper church, you could either stay in there and pray.. But you know the children who don't know how to pray and all that could go and play in the other.. I enjoyed it because it was fun and you have to like draw pictures of God and we read stories and then we acted them
> Christian girl; school 1

The Roman Catholic pattern was commonly that of short term religious instruction (as a Saturday class) for a period of a month or two prior to initiation, via First Communion. Again the children's accounts suggested the learning involved was not very demanding, and the children told us how the commitment was made worthwhile, by promised rewards, such as an outing or a weekly youth club night for those who completed the course and the celebration party when they eventually took First Communion. One or two reported their dislike of the discipline imposed in one class when a nun shouted at them in order to stop noisy chattering.

> Child 1:   Every Saturday (for a month) you went to the parish house… and you did activities about stuff.. You have to learn about Moses and you have to eat unleavened bread…….. And once about three weeks ago they took us to farm animal world… and its near L……………and the beach..
>
> Catholic boy school 3

Hindu children often reported that they regularly attended heritage language classes, (usually in Gujerati) at the weekend at a local temple or Hindu centre. Religion and

ethics were only a small and largely incidental part of the learning, for example a story or reading book might be based on a Hindu legend or myth, or a song might be a devotional one. One boy told us that the religious content of his lessons amounted to "be nice and don't hit people". Sikh Children in some cases attended or had attended Punjabi language classes at the local Gurudwara, where some of the content might have religious reference.

Religious Organisations As A Place For Leisure Activities

From a children's perspective the great attraction of being involved in the life of a local religious institution appeared to be that it was a place to meet friends and have fun. Many Muslim children, even though they might have mixed feelings about the hard work and strict discipline of the mosque environment said it was good fun to be with their friends at these classes.

> ***Do you like going to mosque?***
> Yeah.
> ***Yeah, tell me why.***
> Because you see all your friends. Talk to them.
>
> Muslim boy school 2

Several Muslim boys talked about playing football, or just playing out with their friends on the way to or from mosque, especially in the light evenings of summer. For one group the mosque car park was a very important space for playing football. This group told us that their mosque had some facilities and activities which were run as a youth club. However this seemed to be an isolated example among the Islamic institutions children in the study attended.

Many children among those who did not have daily sessions at mosque (including a few Muslims) went to one or more regular organised leisure activities or clubs in the evenings or at weekends. For some attendance was time limited or episodic; as one child said "I went a few times but then it got boring." Within this range of activity groups, school based clubs, after school child care agencies and secular sporting activities were important. However many youth clubs, uniformed organisations (cubs, brownies etc.), dance and drama classes and sports activities were associated with religion if only because they were held in halls linked with churches, temples or Gurudwaras. The only activities which had a clear religious content were church choirs or music groups, or midweek fun clubs run by evangelical churches. These were especially significant for many of the white children in the Northern city, including several who did not attend Sunday worship at the church which ran the club.

> They do songs about God and stuff… and worshipping God.. And you do games and you can mess around.. You can have a good time… and then it finishes at half past eight.. And it starts at five, and after cool kids club if you are in secondary school you can go to youth club…
>
> Catholic boy school 3

Some of the boys were involved in religion based sports teams which had occasional trips for matches.

> There is a youth club there and I've joined……….   There is like a football team, and we are going to go to London and play a five a side match… it's against another temple… its on 26th July… and I've been picked to play
> : Hindu boy; school 3

Some of the girls were involved in dancing groups at a temple, although they might not like the style in comparison with "normal" dance.

> I went like once …… dancing at the Temple ………..I'm not into classical dancing and things like, just normal ………..and I've done a bit of Indian Classical Dancing but I don't really enjoy doing it cos it's really hard and you've got to try and make animals with your hands
> Hindu girl school 3

One the whole children tended to go to activities organised within their own faith community, although there were several cases where Hindus or Sikhs attended activities at Christian Centres and one or two Christian children reported attending play schemes or similar activities at centres managed by the Hindu community.

Social Networks In School And Outside: Friendship And Conflict

We move on finally to the area of the interviews which is perhaps most significant for our discussion of social capital, where children talked to us about their social networks within and beyond school. It is hardly surprising that children from all backgrounds talked about their family as being among the most significant others in their lives. A wide variety of family forms were represented around the children in our sample, with children being brought up by lone parents, grandparents, in large multi generational households as well as two parent nuclear families. Many children mentioned siblings, often with a sense of tense companionship. Many also mentioned cousins as important playmates, and the relationship often described as cousin/brother or cousin/sister was especially important to many of the children of Asian heritage. The majority of friendships mentioned were with those of the same school year cohort as themselves. When relationships outside school time were listed, older and younger children often featured, including siblings, cousins and friends from religion based or other leisure activities.

To illustrate the patterns we present the sociogram or network diagram of playground interaction in one school.

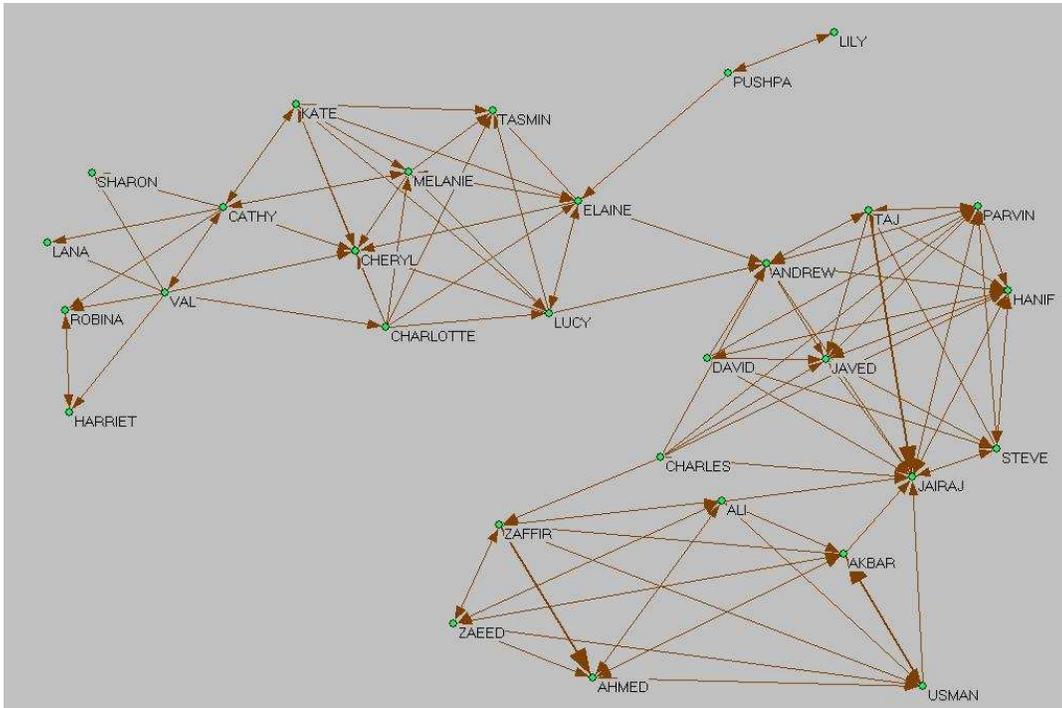## Diagram A :School 3 Playground Network

Diagram A shows the playground interaction as reported by the 24 children from schoool 3 who completed the worksheets in class. The broad outlines of this diagram correspond quite well to what was observed in the playground and classroom over the fieldwork period of several weeks. Aliases here are given by the researchers using names which indicate gender and religious affiliation. The most striking factor illustrated by the diagram is the almost total segregation between the genders. Secondly there is the division between a core group of six highly observant Muslim boys and the other boys who are a mixed group in terms of ethnicity and religion. (However, it has to be pointed out that in this class there was not a single Muslim girl, and one can only speculate about the network patterns if the gender and religion balance had been different.)

One boy in the class "Charles" was somewhat isolated from all the main networks and no one specified him in their list of up to six people they played with. He was a white Catholic boy, a recent arrival in the class and noticeably overweight.

Pushpa and Lily in diagram A are a good example of a 'Paired friendship', where two children mutually identified spending most of their time with each other, (sometimes extending to time outside school) and may talk about each other as being "best friends". All the paired friendships we encountered in the three schools were same-sexed. Some of these pairs came from similar religious and ethnic backgrounds, and others were mixed. There were probably more inter-faith pairs in school 2 where diversity was greatest and had given the opportunity for Muslim/Hindu, Black Christian/Muslim, Sikh/White Christian and other patterns of relationship to develop over time. Usually paired friendships were acknowledged, and sometimes commented on, by other children. Such pairs were sometimes fairly exclusive of other

relationships, but may also occur within the context of larger groups and networks, although in this case they are harder to identify from the outside.

Most playground interaction took place in 'clusters' of three or more members, which were often flexible according to context and who happened to be present at the time. This was the most common type of friendship circle identified by the children in this study (and represented by the 3 main clusters in Diagram A - described by children themselves as "the girls", "the lads" and "the mosque boys"). While most clusters were of a single gender and age group, some were religiously and ethnically mixed, others were not (e.g. Top right with bottom right cluster in Diagram A). In schools 1 and 3 the most exclusive groups were composed entirely of Muslim children and the resulting de facto religious segregation of playground life and its social meanings, did not go unnoticed by other children. Muslim and non-Muslim children were aware that some Muslim children associated more or less exclusively with other Muslims.

For example two highly observant Muslim boys indicated they felt excluded from association outside their own group.

> We play with Hindus sometimes..
> **But you tend mainly to play with Muslims**…
> **Yeah**
> **Have you ever had any Christian friends?**
> No…
> **Why not?**
> **We don't get a chance... they won't play with us Muslims..**
> : two Muslim boys; school 3

However, two Christian girls talked positively about their relationships with Muslims in the class:

> - I don't see why we have to be separated from different religions
> **We all mix in our school because most of the boys are like Muslims and**
> So we just get a long with them
> **Yeah we just play with them**
> We don't think of like their Muslims so we can't play with them, we just play with them
> two Christian girls ;school 3

Gender, Religion and Friendship

It is widely believed, and has often been shown by research, that children in the 9-11 age group spend much of their time in single sex peer group activity. We should also note that in a Muslim environment this is also the age group where many activities children tend to become separated by gender, and the strength of this was reflected by the fact that in the network mapping exercise not a single Muslim child listed a

relationship with a schoolmate of the opposite gender. We observed interaction, recorded children's friendship choices, and heard the children's own accounts of social patterns in which same sex relationships predominated across all types of children. This is not to say that there was no interaction or a total absence of friendships between boys and girls in the school context. and a small minority talked about boy-friend / girl-friend relationships.

However, the public discourse of children about the opposite sex tended to set boys and girls up in opposition to each other. For example teasing or derogatory comments were made, by both boys and girls;

> **Are there any kids in the class who you don't play with or don't get on with**
> The girls
> **The girls what's wrong with the girls?**
> They are ugly
> **Sometimes they spoil things ... we wind them up**

> Two Christian boys, school 3

> …
> **What's wrong with the boys**
> They bug me.. they are typical…
> **What's typical about boys… I was a boy once..**
> They are boys…
> **What's wrong with them**
> They are boys..
> **There must be a reason**
> They are boys..
> **They are boys..**
> **What do boys do that bugs you**
> **They always want to spoil our games and make jokes...**

> Christian girl and Hindu Girl school 3

On the other hand some of the Christian girls (unprompted) expressed strong interest in boys as potential, and actual "boy friends". Although they said race or religion would not be a barrier for them, they implicitly or explicitly seemed to rule out Muslim boys who were extensively involved in religion. In school 3 they spoke about a particular Muslim boy who was less observant and classed as one of "the lads", and admitted that at least one girl "fancied" or had even "gone out with" him. They commented that such relationships are difficult because "his mother doesn't want him to go out with a white girl". On the other hand boys were less likely to talk about girls in this way and some Muslim boys tended to become particularly embarrassed if asked anything about girls in the class.

Racism, Religion and Conflict

Several children (across all ethnic groups including whites) told us they found it hard to get on with others who they considered to be racist, or behaving in a racist way. We heard about (and witnessed) some fights both within school and in the street. These for the most part did not involve children of different religious or ethnic backgrounds. However, some children did tell us of such "racialised" conflict in school and, more often, out in the community.

> *is there aggro between Muslim kids and white kids…*
> Yes there is, because all the Muslims they hang around together and they say stuff about white kids.. which I can't say to you because you will tell the teacher…
> *I said I won't tell…*
> They said that F*****…..ing white..
> **Donkey…**
>   two Christian girls; school 3

> We've had fights with other children.. calling people names and everything?
> *People call you names sometimes?*
> People do.. they call me like they do.. they say racist things..
> **They go "paki" and everything**
> The say to me "Bin Laden"
>   two Muslim Boys, school 1

However, two friends (a Hindu girl, and an observant Christian girl) commented about children sometimes saying things they don't really mean:

> *would you say that it is not racist in your school because it is mixed?*
> No. Like there's some,….. not much…, people that fight and they just say it
> **They say it, they don't mean it but they just say it to try and hurt someone**
> *Can you give me an example?*
> One person fighting a different race say an Asian and a Christian and then when they're fighting one of them calls him ??? then it becomes a big argument
> **And then one blames it on someone else and say oh you called me this first**
>   Hindu girl and Christian girl school 3

This type of comment combined with other comments in the data, tends to support the view that children generally think of relationships as being built out of a series of personal interactions, and choices made by individual social actors. While they do recognize that wider social structures and norms (for example those linked with race, gender and religion) can impinge on social situations, for the most part they do not see these as determining the nature of their own individual relationships. Many of the children (both white and ethnic minority) were aware of, and used the terms "racist"

and "racism", as powerful language to critique behaviour that they found unacceptable and which they interpreted as being based on ethnic or religious difference. Clearly the perception of racism, or the labelling of incidents as racist, can have consequences as significant as the incident itself.. The contrast between the ethnic term "Asian" and the religious term "Christian" both used here as markers of racial difference, underline how the categories of ethnicity and religion overlap and have fuzzy boundaries in the children's discourse. However, terms such as religious discrimination or Islamaphobia were not used by any of the children.

Discussion of Children, religion and social capital/cohesion

We have now presented enough evidence from the research project to allow us to return to a discussion about what social capital means from the perspective of a child living in a multi-ethnic multi-faith neighbourhood in Britain at the beginning of the 21st Century. It is obvious first of all from the analysis of our largely qualitative data that our findings do not slot in easily to the macro level quantitative and comparative approach favoured by Putnam and many of the policy makers he has influenced. From the children's own accounts we have described social process in which each child is actively and often creatively and reflectively involved, albeit within the framework and constraints of social institutions such as the school, and the religious organisations found in their neighbourhood. We should note also that these interactions take place in the context of representations of religious, ethnic and cultural identities and the dynamics between them which are shaped at the societal, and increasingly at the global level. As already been suggested this emphasis on agency and process fits far better with Bourdieu's approach to social capital.

From the perspective of sociology of childhood it is important to ask how do children resolve the tension in religious and social life between their own sense of agency and the obvious constraints imposed by adult institutions? The evidence from our study is that many children by the age of eleven, at least those who in our terms are religiously observant, have not only accepted the traditions and beliefs that have been communicated to them by the older generation but have come to own a religious identity and orientation and to take part in ritual practices for themselves often with considerable pride. Even among those who have not been brought up in a highly religious family, some at least are able to reflect on and participate in religion in their own right. There are of course many children, including those who outwardly at least highly observant, who may find the expectations and impositions of adults in the religious field irksome, boring or irrelevant. There is much in our data to suggest that when this happens groups of children often create spaces for themselves and their peers to maximise the fun that can be had in and around religion. Be it by playing football in the mosque car park, chattering quietly to their class mates in their classes, messing around outside the temple while adults are worshipping or choosing to go to a club where sports and leisure plays a more predominant part than religious instruction, children enjoy themselves and strengthen bonds with others.

Bourdieu's emphasis on different types of capital operating in distinct social fields leads us to ask how far is religious capital and the religious field distinguishable from

social capital and the overall pattern of children's social lives? We are talking here of a religious capital that is primarily social, rather than any sense of spiritual capital by which a child may be inwardly strengthened to ride on the roller coaster of human experience, or even be brought closer to the Divine, however they apprehend it. Clearly for a child who is observant and spending much of their time in social networks and institutions which are largely defined by religion, a range of religious performances will secure approval from adults and often from other children, within the faith community concerned. Thus learning to recite the Quran or memorise a bible verse, dressing appropriately for religious rituals, keeping the fast in Ramadan or partial fasting on an auspicious day for Hindus, professing salvation in an evangelical church or acting as altar server in a Catholic one, have helped children in our sample to acquire religious capital. Whether that religious capital is of any value or relevance in everyday life, in school or in the child's home, depends very much on whether significant other in these wider fields share or at least respect, similar religious values. For those who lead highly observant lives which are spent mostly within a close knit religious group, such as many of the Muslims and some of the more evangelical Christians religion may make a major impact on the domestic sphere and create some areas of tension in the wider public sphere. For example diets are shaped by religion and some children may not be allowed to watch TV, or particular programmes, or may not wish to join in singing at school.

Our final question is one which would be of interest to Putnam and communitarian policy makers for it concerns the issues of bonding and bridging within and across religious identities, and ultimately therefore social cohesion. What role does religion play in fostering bonding between children of similar religious backgrounds and assisting or hindering bridging with children of other backgrounds? Our answer to this question is an extremely complex one. First of all we must ask what otherness means for children living in settings of religious and ethnic diversity. In many ways it is the adult world that is the most comprehensive "other" they encounter and the children we talked to shared a consciousness of being children, indeed of being children of a particular age cohort, usually localised in a loyalty to their class or year group in school, which transcended boundaries of ethnicity and religion. Although most of the children expressed a sense of bonding to particular adults, in their family or perhaps to a teacher, their relationship to the adult world, and to older and younger children, tended to be one of bridging rather than bonding and one of instrumental necessity rather than personal choice within their own use of time.

It is clear from the children's accounts of their friendship and association patterns that gender segregation is so commonplace as to be taken for granted most of the time. While this is hardly surprising to anyone familiar at an everyday level with preadolescents, or with relevant research studies there are some slight differences which may be related to religion. Muslim children in particular were well accustomed to gender segregated lives in the context of activities at mosque and to some extent at home. In contrast some of the Christian children expressed interest in members of the opposite sex as boy-friends / girl-friends (actual or potential). Although there were a few occurrences of relationships which could be seen as bridging between groups of boys and girls, there was a distinct lack of bonding social capital that crossed the gender divide. Remembering the pioneering contribution of anthropologist Elizabeth Bott (1957) to social network analysis, in which she studied gender segregated networks of "ordinary" English couples, one might ask whether there is a universal

fracture of social capital by gender or whether males and females work with fundamentally different types and functions of social capital.

Finally we can move on to consider the question of religious and ethnic identity and its relation to the children's use of social capital. As we have shown neither ethnic nor religious identities are simple categories but have permeable boundaries and are subject to negotiation in specific contexts. Furthermore there is an intricate and flowing complexity in the relationship between the linguistic, ethnic and religious elements in identity formation and maintenance. Therefore when talking about bridging we encounter the problem that a model based on road links between the sides of a river or two islands is not a very helpful metaphor. In school bridging between class 6E and 5G or between the girls and boys in class 6E may be a more significant problem than bridging between Hindu, Christian and Muslim children. Yet outside the school in the religious field there may be almost complete segregation in the life of these religious groups.

Our data it would seem shows two contrasting facts. In the first place religion and ethnicity does not in itself seem to prevent bonding between children as there are plenty of examples of friendship pairs and groups across these barriers. It may be, and there are hints of evidence in some noticeable differences between the situation in the London school and the schools in the North of England, that a different balance of numbers between the religions and ethnic groups makes for a different pattern of inter-faith and inter ethnic dynamics. But it is also the case in the schools in the North at least that a strong sense of Islamic identity and coupled with frequent religious observance which takes up a high proportion of children's time compounded by what the children would call "racist" attitudes and exclusionary behaviour on both sides, does seem to structure strong bonding social capital and little by way of bridging. For those of us whose political and religious values lead us to be concerned with social cohesion, community harmony and working together for the welfare of children these barriers and incipient conflicts must remain a cause of considerable anxiety. Simplistic policy nostrums for increasing the overall stock of social capital, whether or not they involve "faith communities", or whether or not they are targeted at children and young people in and outside schools, are hardly likely to be an effective way of overcoming these problems.

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