Chapter 3 Students, teachers, alienation and happiness

I am a year 11 student who is currently sitting their GCSE examinations. Many people I know suffer from depression and anxiety, we lose sleep, we don’t want to wake up in the mornings and we are afraid to walk into the exam rooms.

We are told over and over again that if we do not achieve level 7 or above we will not be able to progress in the future. I am not very academic and my skills are in the creative arts. However, my passion for those things is taken away when I have to sit a written drama exam for 40% of my grade.

What are we teaching the younger generation by forcing year 11s to sit these exams? We are teaching them that the only way to achieve their dreams or be successful in what they want to do is by getting amazing GCSE results.

Please, our voices are not being listened to. GCSEs damage our perception of ourselves beyond belief. If the government refuses to hear the people sitting the exams, maybe it will listen to the Guardian. Thank you.
Fiona Doyle (1)
London

Intensely collaborative processes of curriculum enactment are adopted by teachers as a way of coping with ‘performance’ pressure which threatens to ‘squeeze out’ time and space to think about geography in the curriculum. This is somewhat alienating for the individual, who might ask ‘where do I fit in?’ or ‘who am I in all this?’ The research finds that committed geography teachers are indeed asking these questions (albeit implicitly) and turning to their personal identities as geography teachers as a form of resistance to the threat of overwhelming power from society ‘outside’ controlling their lives and work as geography teachers. David Mitchell (2) p. 160

How do we slow down? This is what I am thinking a lot about. It feels like every time we slam our foot on the accelerator market “business as usual” or “back to normal!”, the virus surges back and says “slow down”. Naomi Klein, (3) p. 6

In 2018 Fiona Doyle was among the first cohort of students to take the new harder GCSE examinations introduced by Michael Gove when he was education secretary. These made it more difficult to achieve the top levels, excluded coursework, and put a premium on English Baccalaureate subjects, including
geography, thought to be favoured by universities. A product of the reforms outlined in the previous chapter, the examinations damaged many of the students who sat them and contributed to what the National Children’s Bureau termed a ‘mental health crisis in our classrooms’ (4).

Mitchell’s research (2) examined how teachers in four secondary geography department enacted the curriculum in the face of the pervasive forces of what he terms ‘late capitalism’ (neoliberalism). He found a tension between the teachers’ potential agency to make a geography curriculum and the controlling socio-economic climate of accountability and performance pressure linked to educational reforms. Teachers’ coping strategy is to work together both at school level and in wider virtual and unidentified communities. Curriculum enactment has become ‘hyper-socialised’ in a ‘speeded-up’ world (p. 169). Note Mitchell’s use of the phrases ‘alienating for the individual’ (in the quote at the head of the chapter) and ‘speeded up world’.

This chapter seeks to interpret student and teacher unhappiness using the Marxist theory of alienation (5) as applied to education and the critical theory of social acceleration (6) as developed by Rosa. After introducing the Marxist theory and its six overlapping concepts, it examines evidence that students and teachers are alienated and considers their responses and those of school managers and policy makers. The mainstream response is what Davies (7) terms the ‘happiness industry’ that prompts the teaching of happiness and well-being in schools. The chapter argues that this is an inadequate and flawed response, too focused on the individual. The critical response is to explore the social causes of unhappiness and the social changes needed to promote happiness or end alienation.

A critical school geography that includes a focus on the geography of happiness is one way of doing this. Rosa maintains that the speeding up of social life leads many to experience the world as indifferent or repulsive to their true needs, and suggests that the solution lies in changed forms of development that allow the self and the world to resonate with one another. The increased resonance which many people experienced during the lockdown associated with coronavirus in 2020, suggests a more humanistic school geography that fosters resonance; examines the factors that make some societies happier than others; and pays attention to both the cognitive and affective domains of learning.
Students and teachers are unhappy or happy (alienated or not) to varying extents and for varying reasons. Hence the curriculum should draw on **intersectionality theory** (8) to acknowledge the different identities and personal geographies that students bring to the classroom and ways of using these as a resource to discover similarity and develop solidarity by starting from difference. Teenagers are more attracted to identity and single issue based politics than traditional forms of electoral politics and studying the **geography of happiness** (9) can encourage them to reflect on the latter as they acknowledge the role of the state in promoting happiness by promoting equality and citizens’ welfare.

The geography of happiness suggests that in Scandinavian countries, with a different culture and an alternative form of capitalism, citizens and school students are happier. The associated curriculum unit focuses on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and GCE topic 3 (underlying assumptions and power dynamics) by examining Finland: the reasons why citizens report higher levels of happiness and well-being, and the role of schooling in fostering these.

**Alienation and schooling**

Reference has already been made to **alienation** (5) in the context of postcapitalism, where it was contrasted with useful doing (page 16). Marx’s basic thesis was that the way in which people relate to one another in capitalist societies denies them their true human nature. While they are naturally communal and co-operative, the economic organisation of capitalism, based on private property and competition, thwarts these tendencies. The result is their general impoverishment and disempowerment that Marx termed alienation (estrangement from the world). Instead of controlling and developing in common the products of their manual and mental labour (useful doing), most people find the reverse to be the case. The products come to control them as they are subject to the unpredictable movements of markets, dependent on the cash economy, and governed by economic and political elites. Students and teachers are alienated by processes at work both within schools (10) and in the wider society.

**Kesson** (11) outlines the development of ideas on alienated labour in the work of Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx, and uses six related and overlapping concepts (Figure 3.1) to explain the comments of her graduate students about their work in Brooklyn schools. She claims that in this poor, multi-cultural neighbourhood, neoliberal educational reform is serving to deskill teachers leaving little
opportunity for reflection, creativity and professional growth. One result is that teachers serve as role models of alienated labour rather than of the professional workers that students need and deserve.

| Deskilling | The teacher loses autonomy or control over the curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum planning and delivery are increasingly separated with school managers, exam boards, inspectors, and ultimately the government having increased power over teachers’ work. Deskilling is used to ensure uniformity of thinking and marginalise critical thinking. |
| Proletarianisation | To the extent that teachers lose control of the labour process and lack autonomy in the workplace, they are moved from the professional middle class to the working class. This process is enabled by a distinct class of school managers who play by bureaucratic rules and have power to monitor, sanction or promote teachers. |
| Objectification | The student becomes an object or commodity to be schooled in ways that ensure the highest possible text score or exam grade. Schools become ‘exam factories’ with assembly line production unable to respond to the desires and needs of their students. School work becomes an ‘alien object’ produced under pressure, often entirely unrelated to what students already know and value. |
| Intensification | The pace and timing of teachers’ work is speeded up or accelerated to accommodate new production demands linked to educational reforms. Teachers are required to deliver rising standards, deliver a growing number of school policies, and maintain the interest of ever more discerning students who can learn from an expanding range of media available outside school. |
| Reification | Rather than being made by a professional teacher taking account of the needs of students and community, and the potentials of the subject, the curriculum becomes a thing in the form of a textbook, exam syllabus, or a worksheet downloaded from the internet. Teachers and students then behave according to the logic of these ‘things’ — if content is unlikely to come up in the exam then it is not worth teaching. |
| Resistance | Teachers engage in conscious and unconscious attempts to challenge the dominant / hegemonic beliefs and values of society with acts aimed at social and cultural transformation. Critical teachers draw on critical approaches to their subject and critical pedagogy underpinned by critical social theory. |

**Figure 3.1 Six concepts relating to alienation and education** Based on (11)

As regards school students, alienation results from an often authoritarian regime in which students are required to follow an imposed academic curriculum which
some find boring, and complete tasks that some find meaningless. Many are emotionally damaged by competitive individualism, constant testing, and labelling as failures, with low achievers having the lowest levels of well-being. Working class students are over-represented amongst low achievers; tend to be in the lower sets where streaming exists; and are generally found in ‘less good’ schools with less experienced teachers. Their culture, knowledge and ways of learning are rarely acknowledged with the result that they are more like to misbehave and more likely to be temporarily or permanently excluded than their middle class peers (12). Student alienation is related to the concepts of objectification; intensification, and reification in Figure 3.1 and their resistance takes the form of disruptive behaviour and/or attempts to realise a more relevant curriculum.

Teachers are alienated or made unhappy to varying extents by all five of the processes listed in Figure 3.1 and their resistance takes the form of seeking fulfilment through their subject and subject community; engaging in trade union or other political activity; seeking compensatory happiness in their life outside school; moving to a school with fewer ‘problems’ (including international school abroad); or leaving the profession.

As noted above, unhappiness results from lives lived both within and outside schools. It is to the external sources of student unhappiness we now turn since unhappiness originating beyond the school is brought into the classroom.

UK teenagers’ unhappiness

In April 2015 an OECD report *Students’ Well Being* (13) linked to its Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) suggested that school students in the UK were among the least happy in the world. Asked to rate their life on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the worst possible life and 10 means the best, UK students came 37th out of 47 countries with a mean score of 7.0 against an all country mean of 7.3. Pupils in eastern Asian countries who were top performers in the PISA tests – such as those in China and Japan – were all less happy than those in the UK. The Dominican Republic had the happiest students.

Further evidence that many UK teenagers are unhappy is provided by the Children’s Society’s *Good Childhood Report* (2018) (14). It examines the impact of multiple disadvantage on children and young people’s happiness, with the one million 10 to 17 year olds facing 7 or more of the 27 serious
problems identified being ten times more likely to be unhappy than those with none. Disadvantages are grouped into four categories: parent-child relationships; family / household factors; material factors; and neighbourhood factors. Figure 3.2 shows the percentage of UK children and the estimated number of 10 to 17 year olds affected by a sample of the disadvantages in the latter categories. The report shows a linear relationship between multiple disadvantage and children’s reported level of subjective well being. 29% of children with seven or more disadvantages report low well-being. England ranked 13th out of 14 countries for life satisfaction and 11th for feelings of happiness and feeling positive about the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of disadvantage</th>
<th>% of children</th>
<th>Estimated population of 10 to 17 year olds experiencing disadvantage in UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debt. Household has problem debt.</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>1,7000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child poverty. Equivalised income is less than 60% of median household income.</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destitution. Family has used a food bank.</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness. Family has been homeless.</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding. Child shares room.</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of neighbourhood. Worried about two or more crimes/anti-social behaviours happening.</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>2,200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.2 A sample of the disadvantages reported in the Good Childhood Report (6) p. 9**

*Introducing Generation Citizen* (15) a report from Demos commissioned by the National Citizenship Survey, drew on a representative survey of a thousand teenagers aged 14 to 17, three focus groups with teenagers and three focus groups with teachers, carried out in 2013. It examined the issues that most concerned teenagers. Figure 3.3 shows that as they get older concerns over getting a job and living costs steadily increase. For 14 and 15 year olds, image pressures and bullying are the biggest issues but by the time they are 17, student debt is one of the biggest issues. **Rates of anxiety and depression** amongst teenagers have increased by 70% in the last 25 years (16). *Choose Childhood* (17) a report from Action for Children in 2019, claimed that 53% of 16 year
olds were worried about their mental health with schoolwork and exams being their top concern followed by falling out with friends.

**Figure 3.3 The top social issues of concern according to teenagers 14 - 17 (7) p. 64**

Covid-19 disrupted the education and lives of all teenagers with those already marginalised and disadvantaged becoming more so. *Young Minds* (18) surveyed its impact on those with mental health issues, finding that it had worsened symptoms, increased feelings of loneliness and reduced support for the majority, with only 11% reporting that their mental health had improved during the crisis.

**UK young people’s happiness**

Moving from children and teenagers to young people aged 16 to 25, the Prince’s Trust commissions an online survey each year to measure their happiness and confidence about different areas of their lives. In 2018 the resulting *Youth Index* (19) was at its lowest level since the survey started in 2008 with respondents worried about employment, education and money, and challenged by a highly competitive labour market and the rising costs of both housing and
higher education (Figure 3.4). Such concerns are transmitted to younger siblings still at school.

![Figure 3.4 Concerns expressed by young people (16 to 25) on being asked what they worry about (19)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>worry about ‘not being good enough in general’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>worry that their school, college or university grades aren’t good enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>worry about not having enough friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>worry about how they come across on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>worry about not knowing what they want in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>worry about the current economic climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48%</td>
<td>worry about their body image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>worry about their finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>worry about their future overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48%</td>
<td>worry about their mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>worry about their physical health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Trust’s 2019 report (20) highlighted the role of social media in encouraging young people to compare themselves with others online, a habit that intensifies insecurities and instabilities and may lead to despair (Figure 3.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over half (57 per cent) of 16 to 25 year-olds say that social media creates an overwhelming pressure to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly half (46 per cent) think that comparing their lives to others on social media makes them feel “inadequate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two in five (41 per cent) young people feel more confident online than they do in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A third (32 per cent) think that social media makes them feel like they can have a voice for their generation to influence positive change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixty per cent of young people find it difficult not to compare their lives to others online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly half (48 per cent) say they feel more anxious about their future when seeing the lives of their friends online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 3.5 Life Online, compare and despair (20)]
It also reported that nearly two thirds of young people (65%) always or often felt stressed

**Young people, austerity and intergenerational inequality**

The concerns of teenagers and young people remind us that they have grown up in age of austerity and borne the brunt of cuts to public spending. Funding of services for children and young people in England fell by almost a third between 2010 and 2019 (the equivalent of £3bn) with cuts to children’s centres, youth clubs, and other services supporting families (21). Spending per pupil in English schools fell by 8% between 2010 and 2016 (22) and austerity also led to the ending of the educational maintenance allowance and cuts to advice and support, mental health, leisure, and disability services for young people (23) (24). Reform of welfare benefits left an increasing number of families and children in poverty (25) yet individualisation (26) fostered by neoliberalism, encourages teenagers and young adults to face risk society (27) alone. They must negotiate their own way in a global network society (28) and chapter seven) where social media offer both key resources for identity construction and political participation and a means of social control.

School students learn from their older siblings (generation left (29)) that the chances of getting a 'good' job, finding somewhere to live, and attaining a standard of living comparable to that of their parents and grandparents are slim. Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000) risk becoming a 'jilted generation' (30) with some commentators suggesting that baby boomers, born in the decade after WW2, have ‘stolen their future’ (31). The most severe symptom of this is environmental breakdown (32) with biodiversity loss and climate change accelerating since 1945 (chapter six).

Recent Conservative governments have been charged with implementing socialism for the old and capitalism for the young (33) with the result that the intergenerational contract has been broken; intergenerational inequality has increased (34); and social mobility has declined (35). Working class young adults who are denied the benefits of ‘the bank of mum and dad’ are particularly hard hit and over-represented amongst those not in employment, education or training (NEETS) (36).

In 2018, the Intergenerational Commission proposed a new generational contract (37) with radical proposals to rebalance the economy between baby
boomers and millennials and redistribute wealth between generations. These require an active state prepared, for example, to raise taxes on property and corporations and put new obligations on employers and richer pensioners. While the proposals had the support of business leaders and trade unions, the history of such think tank reports suggests that it is unlikely to lead to significant change. Milburn (29) argues that solidarity between the generations requires the ending of the hold of private property ownership on the old and precarity (chapter five) on the young. The provision of basic income / services for all would facilitate a realignment of what are essentially class interests: social security in both youth and old age with the old offering their free time to support the young and the young offering social contact (sociality) to counter the currently all too common isolation and loneliness of old age.

The **coronavirus crisis** (38) impacted most severely on those already disadvantaged by austerity and the severe recession likely in its wake will impact on young people’s employment prospects and may further widen intergenerational inequality.

**School students’ resistance**

Students’ resistance to schooling takes the form of disruptive behaviour and efforts to secure a more relevant curriculum. Some would claim there is little evidence of alienation in schools. Student satisfaction is high, classroom behaviour is good, and permanent exclusions at a low level. Others would disagree.

People who are alienated, oppressed, exploited or discriminated against, including school students and teachers, may report that they are happy due to a state of **false consciousness** (39). They have not experienced alternative ways of organising society and schooling and would rather assume happiness than face up to the truth of their unhappiness, a phenomena that should be taken into account when considering reported levels of student and teacher satisfaction with schooling.

A somewhat dated **Department for Education report** (40) found only 4% of secondary students dissatisfied with their school. and among its findings was that ‘satisfaction levels are high in schools that actively seek, value and act on pupils’ views, but the quality of teaching, range of enrichment activities and leadership of the headteacher are among many other factors that correlate strongly with pupils’ satisfaction’. Hadyn (41) questions the official assertion
that behaviour is satisfactory or better in 99.7% of English schools and suggests ways in which classroom climate might be improved. An independent review in 2017 (42) that made recommendations on improving school cultures as a route to improved behaviour, admitted ‘many children are expected to learn in conditions that could be substantially improved’ (p.14). It reports over 75% of teachers considering student behaviour to be good or better, a finding that conflicts with a NUT commissioned report of 2004 (43) that found ‘most teachers interviewed mentioned classroom disruption as their biggest problem’ (p.16). Television series such as Educating Essex (44) or the more recent School (45) support the claim that alienation leading to poor behaviour affects a significant minority of pupils.

For a small minority of students, alienation and associated disruption leads to permanent exclusion. Figure 3.6 (page 103) shows exclusion rates across the UK but the real number of excluded students may be four or five times greater than the official figures (46). Students are increasingly ‘off-rolled’ or taken off the register to improve performance data or are subject to ‘over exclusion’ when schools refuse to deal with their problems (47). Some are ‘internally excluded’ by being sent to isolation booths (48).

Excluded children are the most vulnerable: twice as likely to be in the care of the state, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and 10 times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems. Yet our education system is profoundly ill-equipped to break a cycle of disadvantage for these young people. (49)

Of 29 gang members on a north London housing estate, 17 had been permanently excluded from school. Marginalisation resulting from schooling and other factors leads such young men to attempt to make their way in life in the brutal and unpredictable world of the illegal drug trade where research shows the most traumatised and frightened are frequently the most violent (50).

As regards students’ efforts to secure a more relevant curriculum, in 2018 the Youth Parliament was campaigning in England for what it termed A Curriculum for Life (51). It wanted personal, social and health education (PSHE) in schools to address what all young people needed to actively participate in life: finances, relationships and sex, the political system, cultural awareness and community cohesion, sustainable living and citizenship. It wanted this to be taught by
trained teachers, and to be delivered as part of the regular timetable. Not merely as a time filler or random lessons.

Figure 3.6  Permanent exclusion rate by local authority (42)
In 2019 students were striking over the climate crisis and had formed Teach the Future (52) to campaign for a government review into how education is preparing them for this and the related ecological crisis (chapter six). Young people’s engagement with identity and formal politics is considered in chapter eight. There the implications for curriculum making of students’ increased use of social media to identify with radical movements are considered.

**Teacher unhappiness**

A survey of 3,5000 members of the Nasuwt in 2015 (53) suggested that around 90% of teachers regarded workload as a problem, followed by pay 45%, inspection 44%, curriculum reform 42% and pupil behaviour 40%. Over 65% thought the job affected their mental or physical health and over 80% had reported workload stress. In 2018 a NEU survey (54) found that 80% of teachers had considered leaving their job in the past twelve months citing workload, lack of support, and poor pupil behaviour among their reasons. Teacher recruitment and retention had become a key policy issue with only 80% of secondary training places being filled. An Ofsted report in 2018 (55) identified five causes of teacher stress: Ofsted itself; low wellbeing; parents; less than half working week spent teaching; and senior leaders who aren’t sufficiently supportive, NFER statistics from the same year suggest that the secondary school system faced major problems of teacher supply and retention (56). Young teachers are impacted by intergenerational inequality, student debt, and the high cost of living in many parts of Britain.

Teacher unhappiness is linked to the climate of ‘performativity’ and ‘deliverology’ (page 64) that accompanies educational reform. Geography teachers are required to produce more data on pupil progress; follow numerous school policies on such issues as teaching and learning, assessment, and safeguarding; obtain good examination results for their students; submit to constant inspection and appraisal by a new managerial class (the senior management team); and sustain the interest and engagement of students who have a wealth of media to educate, entertain and distract them. Geography is the third hardest subject into which to recruit teachers after science and maths; only two thirds of secondary geography teachers have a post A level qualification; and schools serving the lower income communities have less experienced and less qualified teachers, and higher rates of teacher turnover (57) (see page 68).
Teacher resistance

Teachers resist the processes leading to alienation by seeking to maintain their professionalism through trade union activity, membership of subject associations such as the GA; membership of pressure groups such as the SEA; and advocacy of and engagement in critical education. Mitchells’ research (2) shows that under the pressures of late capitalism, many geography teachers cope by sharing, borrowing and ‘contracting out’ their curriculum making (relying heavily on the internet) and by turning to their identity as geographers. 

"Paradoxically, hyper-socialised curriculum enactment can be alienating for the individual, because the intensely ‘socialised’ nature of curriculum making removes the time and space for geographical curriculum making – described by one teacher in the study as a ‘luxury’." p. 174

Their turn to their subject as a form of resistance to the threat of the ‘overwhelming power of society controlling their lives and work’ means that some adopt a critical geography stance. But he finds the teachers in the four departments he visited are generally ‘somewhat ambivalent with respect to handling change’. Much of the curriculum is recycled, shared and re-used and resort to geographical identity in changing times ‘does not always translate to driving curriculum change’ p. 175

Given the pressures of recent years, one might expect an increase in the number of geography teachers to adopt critical geography identities; express an interest in democratic socialist education; and rediscover the case for more integrated forms of curriculum with relaxed classification and framing of educational knowledge (see chapter four). The contents of GA journals do not suggest such an increase.

The Happiness Industry

Davies (58) notes that the science and business of happiness has come to pre-occupy corporate leaders and politicians in advanced industrial economies. They have pioneered a happiness industry that uses neuroscience, psychology, pharmaceuticals, smart apps, human resources management, and counselling of many kinds to turn happiness into a means of making profit and exercising social control. The industry is dependent on the measurement of happiness and an associated geography of happiness, and is impacting on schools where lessons on happiness and well-being are now common (59).
Smith (60) provides background on happiness and education, drawing on the work of Richard Layard (61) and Jean Baudrillard, that attributes unhappiness to changes in family structures that increase students’ insecurity and restrict routes to civic engagement; possessive individualism that prompts students to compare themselves unfavourably with others; suburban sprawl that erodes the spatial integrity of communities; and electronic entertainment and social media that lead to privatised leisure time (62). Declining involvement in associations and civic life also leads to loneliness and the erosion of social solidarity.

Smith concludes by suggesting that happiness is promoted in schools by:

- Caring for the needs of the whole person;
- Promoting opportunities for informal and community learning and adopting a dialogical approach;
- A curriculum that does not alienate students; and
- Easy access to counselling and pastoral provision.

Davies locates the causes of unhappiness in the workings of contemporary surveillance capitalism (63) and its associated technology. Capital now circulates at a faster rate producing a 24/7 culture in which digital devices can track our health, moods, and job performance. Post-industrial (neoliberal, postmodern, late capitalist) consumer culture captures our desires, opinions and values, channels advertising, products and ‘friends’ towards us, requires our psychological and emotional engagement, but creates unrealistic expectations. The result is that many fail to keep up and retire ‘hurt’, withdrawn and mentally depressed. Others strive to keep up and become increasingly stressed and alienated, eventually realising that the dream of affluence is unattainable. The ideas of Smith and Davies overlap and when linked to the ideas about alienation, schooling, austerity and intergenerational inequality explored above, largely explain the concerns and worries of teenagers, and young people.

Rather than turning the issue of unhappiness inwards towards people’s feelings as the happiness industry seeks to do, Davies argues that we should turn it outwards to critique society. Countering alienation by empowering people to rediscover their dignity, exercise judgement, and gain greater control over their lives, is the real solution to unhappiness. Ultimately it is institutions rather than people that should change and he cites research evidence in support his argument that leads to the following generalisations:
- Mental illness correlates very closely to level of economic inequality across society as a whole;
- The nature and availability of work plays a key role in determining happiness as do organizational structures and managerial practices;
- Participatory decision-making and distributed authority foster well-being in workplace;
- Austerity policies lead to deteriorating mental and physical health;
- Work is more fulfilling in non-profits and co-ops;
- People with materialist values who measure their worth in terms of money have lower levels of happiness. Materialism and social isolation are mutually reinforcing

These generalisations support more sustainable forms of development and critical education that seeks to make schools more comprehensive and democratic, classroom work more enjoyable; teachers more professional; and the curriculum more open to negotiation. They require no student to arrive at school with unmet basic needs; all students’ concerns to be recognized and responded to; and schooling to explore alternative forms of social organisation and development that are less materialistic and provide defences against the affluenza virus. (64).

**Living in Times of Acceleration**

Rosa (6) (65) (66) an accelerationist (67) (page 17) follows earlier critical theorists who have focussed on the downsides of modernity (68), adding theoretical depth to Davies’ ideas and offering a response to alienation (the need for resonance) that has implications for school geography. He begins by asserting that a society or institution can be described as modern when its mode of stabilization is dynamic: when it systematically requires material growth, technological acceleration and cultural innovation to reproduce its structure and to maintain the institutional status quo. Acceleration is a requirement of modern society that produces time-space compression (69) (chapter seven) and is seen in the economy (eg. faster delivery); science (faster publication of research); politics (faster redundancy of election promises); art and literature (faster fashions), the art of living (faster lifestyle changes) and education (faster policy changes and curriculum directives).
Accompanying dynamic stabilization is a cultural programme linked to the dream of ‘the good life’ that fuels social acceleration. Happiness and freedom are to be realized by making more of the world available, accessible, and attainable, a goal that is institutionalized in science, the economy, politics and education. The programme fails (and alienation results) because not all spheres of life can be accelerated at the same pace. Faster systems and groups put pressure on slower ones and four crises arise:

- Ecological – ecological resources and services cannot be renewed at the rate the economy requires;
- Democratic – political decision making cannot keep pace with economic and social change;
- Economic – financial markets move faster than the real economy of production and consumption;
- Psychological - people’s psychic dispositions cannot adapt to the speed of social life.

Rosa’s solution is a post-growth society beyond dynamic stabilization: which does not need to grow, speed up and innovate just to maintain the status-quo. It should still be modern in the sense of being liberal, pluralistic and democratic and should still grow if citizens decide change is needed and desirable. The associated structural and cultural revolutions draw on aspects of democratic and ecological socialism (chapters one and six) such as economic democracy, basic income, and new conceptions of happiness and quality of life, and allow sustainable development and a new left modernity (page 51).

For Rosa the key to realizing such a society is resonance: ‘a mode of being in which the self is moved, touched, and ‘meant to be’ or ‘addressed’ but also feels capable of reaching out and touching or moving the external world’ (p. 300). Alienation and resonance describe difference modes or relationships between self and the world Alienation refers to the first two modes in the following list where the world has lost its propensity to ‘resonate’ while resonance refers to the third:

1. Indifference – the self is disengaged from an indifferent world which it might seek to use or control while it is subject to its effects. The relationship is instrumental or casual in nature.
2. Repulsive – the subject feels thrown into a remorseless, hostile, cold, inimical and merciless world full of obstacles and dangers.
3. Resonance – the subject experiences the world (or a specific segment of it) as ‘answering’, responding, or supporting him or her. The relationship is of an intrinsic nature and constitutive of the subject’s identity.

In everyday terms a person, place, landscape, lesson, decision, or institution resonates with us if it moves or touches us in a way that triggers an internal ‘response’ that signifies a benevolent mutual response between self and world. Such experiences are usually associated with art, nature and religion and are studied by humanistic geographers amongst others. The basic tenet of resonance theory is that they can be generalised into modes of existence and thus be used to evaluate and criticise the quality of life and social conditions. Modes of life (such as those experienced by the citizens and school pupils of Finland featured in curriculum unit 3) can thus be measured in terms of their ‘resonability’.

We will return to experiences of resonance when considering eco-pedagogy and the pedagogy of place in subsequent chapters. For the moment it is important to note that they are always and necessarily temporary, transient and fleeting, and cannot be controlled, intensified, accumulated, or brought on by will. The geography curriculum can be planned in ways that optimise the probability of resonance and such planning will be considered in chapter five.

Rosa’s theory risks idealism or the notion that the world can be changed by merely changing our ideas or opening our senses to resonance. Yes, we need to overcome alienation and resonance has a role to play, but it can and is being co-opted by the happiness industry that promise resonance when, for example, we go on a retreat or take a therapy. To be truly critical, it must be linked to the structural and cultural revolutions that Rosa begins to outline. Class conflict is somewhat lacking from Rosa’s theory, yet acknowledging class is key to countering alienation in classrooms. Fisher (70) offers an alternative critical theory of students’ alienation and political disengagement using the concepts of reflexive impotence (‘they know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can’t do anything about it’ p.21) and anhedonia (‘an inability to do anything else except pursue pleasure’ p.22) to explain their classroom behaviour.
Living in times of slowdown

In his book *Slowdown* (71) Dorling accuses accelerationists of being naive and failing to take account of the evidence. He argues that human progress has been slowing since 1970 and uses a series of figures (72) to show deceleration via such indicators as population growth, GDP/capita, income inequality, technological innovation, and the frequency of new social movements (only carbon emissions, the planet’s temperature, flights, and graduate numbers were accelerating prior to coronavirus). An end to ‘rampant capitalism’ offers a kinder and more sustainable forms of society and politics with Finland offering ‘a model of a future stable society with remarkably low inequality, remarkably good health, and the lowest infant mortality rate on the planet’ (73). As the world population shrinks and ages, and becomes more aware of the costs of consumerism, there are real prospects for sustainable development and more opportunities for resonance that the Covid-19 pandemic and discussion of the ‘next normal’ served to highlight.

Young people’s identities and geographies, acknowledging difference

Before examining how the geography curriculum can incorporate the geography of happiness together with the contemporary critical ideas about happiness examined above, we need to consider young people’s identities, private geographies, and politics. Subjective feelings of well-being; concerns about personal and social issues; levels of identification with consumer capitalism; political beliefs; and sensitivity to varied forms of resonance are part of students’ identities or the qualities, beliefs, personalities, looks and expressions that make them as persons. Students’ identities are emergent, multiple and hybrid and are best accommodated by a critical or ‘multiculture’ view of multiculturalism (Figure 3.7, page 111).

Different identities and aspects of identity co-exist in classrooms and the geography teacher should find ways of acknowledging these and facilitating communication and solidarity amongst them. A focus on young people’s identities and geographies, rather than those of adults, is seen as a way of making school geography more relevant and less adultist. Hopkin et al (74) explain that young people’s geographies (their ways of understanding and responding to the world which form part of their identities) are shaped by
• **Everyday geo-politics** – the economic and political structures and processes operating at local, national and global scales that shape young people’s everyday lives. (Key ideas about geo-politics at the global level are outlined in chapter one, seven and nine. Chapter two examined the local geo-politics of schooling.)

• **Intersectionality** – a way of picturing social relations that acknowledges the complexity of young people’s different experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and oppression and enables the teacher to be attentive to their structural vulnerabilities and social positions.

• **Place** – places offer detailed frameworks (the body, home, institution, neighbourhood, social media, city, nation, etc) for exploring young people’s geographies or how they are affected by, engage with and respond to political issues in particular places. See chapter eight.

| A relational understanding of culture based on interaction between groups (neither ‘minority’ nor ‘mainstream’) |
| No unitary or separate cultures but intercultural fusion or hybridity (creative blending) |
| Emphasises social relations and cultural practices rather than ungrounded notions of identity |
| Takes a broad view of ‘the political’ (transcending boundaries of culture and economy) |
| Linked to ideas of a progressive or global sense of place |
| Tendency to romanticise cultural creativity ignoring material conditions of production |

**Figure 3.7 A ‘multiculture’ model of multiculturalism (75) p. 319**

*Intersectionality* (8) refers to the fact that what are often perceived as disparate forms of oppression, like racism, classism, and sexism, are actually mutually dependent and intersecting and together they compose a unified system of oppression (see Figure 3.8). The theory originated with black lesbian feminist socialists in Boston during the 1970s and led to the original concept of identity politics: a means of organising people of different identities in a project of universal emancipation devoted to dismantling all of the structures that make them unfree, including and especially capitalism itself.
Intersectionality helps us understand student identities and geographies but Figure 3.8 suggests that there is no consensus on what forms of discrimination/privilege should be considered or what role classism plays in
relation to other social classifiers. Social (economic) class is not just another form of inequality and oppression (like age or geographic location) but a mechanism that produces these conditions and allows diverse individuals and groups to find common cause in fighting economic exploitation.

In the classroom social classes are intersected not only by gender, ethnicity, sexuality and dis/ability but also by different class factions. Different groups within the same class will position themselves differently. Some white working class boys will for example continue to engage and learn despite being labelled ‘nerds’ by another faction who have switched off and misbehave.

Martin (77) compares object-based (mainstream) and relational (critical) perspectives on identity and offers three models (differences ignored, differences celebrated, and difference the starting point to recognise similarities) that geography teachers have used to cater for difference during recent decades. Her preferred model is one that recognises culture, place and identity to be complex, hybrid and open to otherness, and difference to be the point from which determinations of sameness can be made rather than the other way round. Dialogue in classrooms (see critical pedagogy, chapter 5 and curriculum unit 8) is the means whereby students come to a more complex and deeper understanding of differences within and between cultures; have their assumptions challenged and reformed; and adopt a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective that provides the foundation for solidarity across difference. This involves commitment to universal values, conscientisation (page 58) and unlearning to make possible a perspective that can usefully guide participation in both identity and more traditional forms of politics.

**The Geography of Happiness and the OECD Better Life Index**

Happiness studies based on purely subjective measures, such as the OECD’s *Student Well Being* report (13) are problematic due to the issue of false consciousness outlined above. To avoid this problem most happiness studies now combine more objective measures (e.g. income level, life expectancy) with some element of subjective assessment (78).

One example in this category is the Better Life Index (79) launched in 2011 by the OECD. The OECD consists of 35 member and 6 partner countries who are ‘committed to market economies backed by democratic institutions’ and seek to promote ‘better policies for better lives’. The index compares well being across
countries based on 11 topics that the OECD has identified as essential in the areas of material living standards and quality of life. Web pages allow visitors to create their own index of well-being by rating the importance of the 11 topics, explore an interactive world map, and download publications and graphics summarising the state of well being in different countries.

Of key importance in terms of ESDGC, is that the country summaries provide an overview of inequalities and trends in natural, economic, human and social capital (80). These can be used to evaluate whether equality is linked to well-being and whether a country is undergoing sustainable development. The social capital data also gives an indication of the quality of governance (81) by including measures of trust in national government; voter turnout; and government stakeholder engagement. An alternative to the OECD study is the World Happiness Report (82)

The Curriculum Unit

The curriculum unit linked to this chapter involves students exploring the Better Life Index website; comparing the performance of the UK and Finland, and seeking to explain the difference. It is an exercise in comparative political economy as while the UK has adopted a liberal form of welfare capitalism, Finland has sustained a socially democratic model (83). There are however other environmental, historical, economic and cultural factors that help to explain why Finns are happier (84) including Finland’s more progressive educational system (85).

In focussing on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and GCE topic 3 (underlying assumptions and dynamics), the unit draws on the work of epidemiologists Wilkinson and Pickett (86) (87) demonstrating that in more unequal countries, outcomes are worse for almost everyone in areas such as public health, education, and social mobility. They support the critical ideas of Davies and Rosa about the costs of contemporary development suggesting we should reduce inequality by increasing economic democracy, redistributing wealth, and moving towards an alternative development model. They also remind us that for 95% of human history, our societies have been ‘assertively egalitarian’.
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Videos for teachers

Fundamentals of Marx, Alienation 6 minutes

Mark Fisher on why modern life causes depression 4 minutes

William Davies on how the government and big business sold us happiness 20 minutes

Meet Germany’s happiness teachers 3 minutes

Hermut Rosa on social acceleration 50 minutes

Conversation with Danny Dorling on Slowdown 35 minutes

Richard Wilkinson on inequality 17 minutes

Polly Toynbee and David Walker make the case for the state and public spending 1 hour 20 minutes