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SPECIAL SECTION

Re-naming and re-framing: Evolving the 'Higher Education Research Group' to the 'Geography & Education Research Group'

Looking ahead to the future of GeogEd: Creating spaces of exchange between communities of practice

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Abstract

As part of the special issue marking the transition of the Higher Education Research Group to the Geography and Education Research Group, in this final paper we argue that the reformed group has a key role to play in promoting spaces of exchange between the communities of practice that have a stake in the shared endeavours of geography and education. We draw on structured conversations from the group's launch event, existing literature, and our particular vantage points to identify a range of influences – both heritages that we work with and challenges that we face – that shape the interplay of geography and education in our pedagogical contexts. We argue that the GeogEd Research Group can create spaces of productive exchange between three communities of practice: geographies of education research, geography education research, and pedagogic research. As the research group brings these communities of practice together, it facilitates dialogue, creates new avenues for research, and connects and enhances geography teaching practice across education levels.

KEYWORDS

communities of practice, geographies of education, geography and education, geography and education research group, geography education, pedagogic research

1 | INTRODUCTION

At the launch of the Geography and Education Research Group (GeogEd) at the University of the West of England in December 2019, the authors gathered to "look ahead to the future" of the group. Like the other writing groups for this special section, we[1] wrote together before the launch and started by responding to Figure 1, used by GeogEd to sketch out endeavours across the shared domains of geography and education. At the launch event we collated thoughts from participants[2] in the form of notes from structured discussions, summarised these, and received feedback from the other writing groups, refining our thinking through continued discussion. Rather than setting forth a substantive research agenda in this paper, our argument – one enacted through the event and in the authorship of this paper – is that GeogEd

has a key role to play in promoting spaces of exchange between communities of practice which have a stake in the shared endeavours of, and intersections between, geography and education.

Drawing on these sources and existing literature, we identify various drivers of change and promising directions of travel for those working at the interface of geography and education. We conceive of this through a prism (an approach with various antecedents; e.g., Spangenberg, 2002), with the influences being "refracted" through the medium of the spaces of exchange, leading to directions of future travel (see Figure 2). We find Lave and Wegner's (1991) concept of "communities of practice" useful to identify the multiple groupings sharing a stake in domains of geography and education, but distinguishable by differences in social practices, different uses of language, conferences and gatherings, places of work, theoretical resources, constituencies to whom they are accountable, and relationships to research. We note three broad communities of practice: those researching the geographies of education, those researching and teaching in geography education, and those undertaking pedagogic research. While there are "borders" between and within these communities, there is also ongoing "border-crossing," alongside moments of intensified reflection and action to promote exchange (Castree et al., 2007; Kinder et al., 2022). We turn first to the idea of communities of practice before discussing

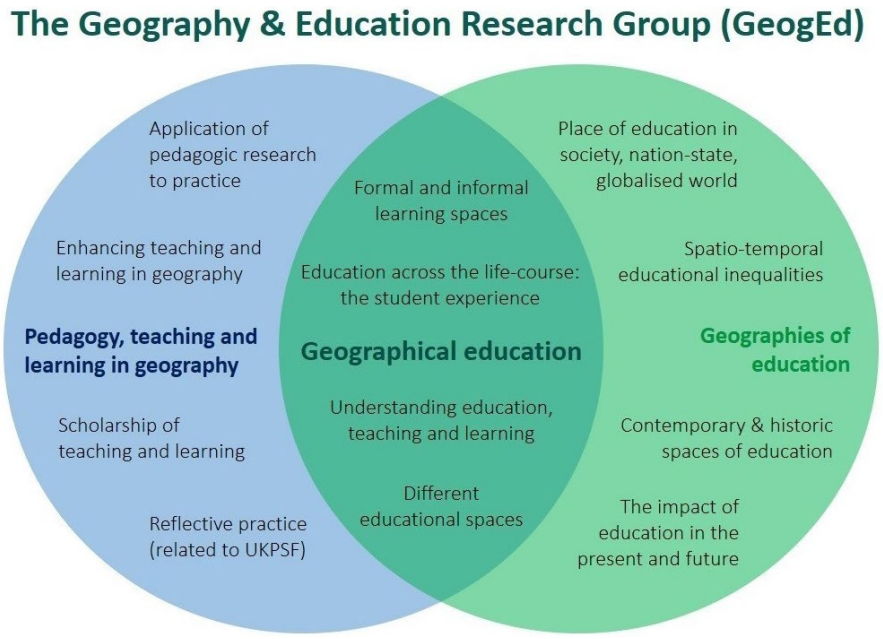

FIGURE 1 The Geography and Education nexus, as shared by the Geography and Education Research Group of the RGS-IBG (GeogEd, 2019)

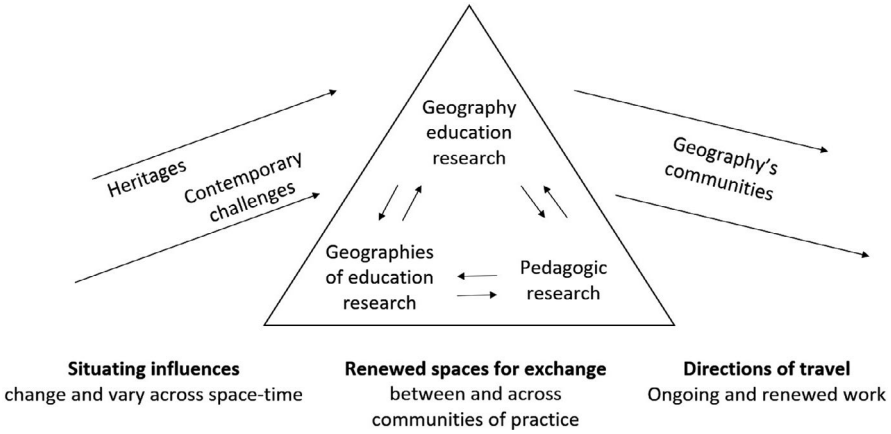

FIGURE 2 Influences, spaces for exchange and directions of travel for those working in the Geography and Education nexus
[Correction added on 23 February 2021 after first online publication: Source information for Figure 2 has been removed in this version.]

some key situating influences across the domains of geography and education in terms of the challenges we see and the heritages we draw on.

2 | COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice "are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1; see also Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within communities of practice, there is a shared domain of interest, about which expertise can be developed; a community that learns through shared interactions (though these are not necessarily in person, or frequent); and a practice for which a repertoire of knowledges and skills can be developed. Both geography and education can be understood as domains of interest and give rise to a range of communities that seek to develop distinct expertise.

An established means of conceptualising the relationships between geography and education has been through the geography education community, broadly composed of the academic geography community, the geography teacher education community, and the school geography community (Castree et al., 2007). With respect to teaching practices, these communities have a shared interest: the collective endeavour of effecting geographical learning, although there are differences in their students and how that project is understood and enacted. However, in terms of the practice of engaging with geographical knowledge, each community is usually seen as occupying different roles (Butt, 2020). In Bernstein's (1996) account of the pedagogic device, knowledge moves from the field of production (typically universities), is said to be recontextualised by actors including the state, exam agencies, subject bodies, teacher educators, and teachers themselves, before it is reproduced in education settings and acquired by students. This implies different relationships to geographical knowledge across these three communities. While Bernstein's (1996) account focused on how knowledge becomes selected, sequenced, and made amenable for acquisition in schools, we note that the relationship between academic and school geography is more complex than producer–consumer, and that academics and their higher education students also acquire academic knowledge.

While conceptualising the relationships between geography and education through the lens of geography education is valuable – for example, in considering transitions between different educational phases, and examining how knowledge is recontextualised between different spaces and the role of different actors in this process – it also has limitations. First, it fails to explicitly consider the geographies of education, and the relationships between geography education and the geographies of education (Dorling, 2020; West et al., 2022). Examining the relationships and intersections between these two areas is significant in understanding students' lifeworlds; examining the broader social, cultural, political, and economic structures in play; and addressing (educational) inequalities (Holloway et al., 2010). Second, this conceptualisation can overlook individuals and groups who work across different educational settings and communities of practice occupying multifaceted identities and roles (Butt & Collins, 2018). Finally, while this conceptualisation frames these communities with respect to the practice of teaching, or their relation to geographic knowledge, the framing we offer in this paper seeks to make clear the contribution these communities of practice can make as researchers. This approach is not developed to value research over teaching; rather we highlight research as a dimension of practice that connects, and is a basis for productive exchange, between these communities. While we will return to these communities in more detail, in the remainder of this paper we work from left to right of Figure 2, turning to the influences we see affecting these communities. In examining the influences that feed in to and affect the space of exchange, we first explore the notion of heritages to highlight the rich histories and praxis in geography as a discipline and field of research and as a study in schools, universities, and beyond.

3 | SITUATING INFLUENCES

3.1 | Heritages

As Geoghagen et al. remind us, geography is a "sprawling, ragged, gorgeous, discipline" (2020, p. 463). This capaciousness has enabled an ill-disciplined tradition of diversity within its curriculum and pedagogies across the connections between physical and human geography and also through its array of sub-disciplinary and regional specialisms. This heritage of creative geographical pedagogical praxis is an international tradition, and can be traced in UK Higher Education (HE) through the work of HERG (Healey et al., 2022) and its connections with the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*,

which celebrated its 40th year in 2016 (Higgitt et al., 2018). This has established not only research on approaches to geography education but also enabled new and alternative spaces of teaching and learning (Hill et al., 2014, 2016).

This heritage of creative and engaged pedagogy is characteristic of all forms and stages of geographical education (Biddulph et al., 2015; Catling & Willy, 2018; Hill et al., 2019; Roberts, 2013). Signature pedagogies (Hill et al., 2014, p. 392) such as fieldwork and spatial information skills offer a distinctively geographical understanding of the wider processes that shape and influence our everyday lives through a critical engagement with place, space, and environment. From formal classroom-based education to informal opportunities to learn and engage, geography holds potential to powerfully connect diverse learners and matters of concern, across age groups and student and teacher roles (Castree et al., 2007; Marvell et al., 2013).

Alongside these heritages stand a set of "contemporary challenges" to geography and education. Turning to literature and discussions from the GeogEd launch event, we take a broad view of some of the key issues that affect the communities of practice we have identified in geography and education. We recognise diversity in education across the nations of the UK (authors of this paper work in three of the four nations), and globally, while noting that we draw predominantly on Anglo-American writing.

3.2 | Contemporary challenges

Pressing for many at the launch event were concerns about the neoliberalising of education from early years to higher and further education (see, for example, those writing in a university context: Berg et al., 2016; Mountz et al., 2015; Smith & Jeffrey, 2013). Casualisation, precarity, and increasing workloads at all levels of geography education are issues that affect teachers, academics, and students in related but also different ways (Megoran & Mason, 2020; Peake et al., 2018; Todd, 2020).

Sites of education – including schools and universities – have complex histories as places of subordination and control but are also potentially empowering and/or liberatory spaces (Brooks, 2019). Esson argues that, in HE, while "geography classrooms [are presented] as emancipatory spaces and mechanisms for enacting positive social transformation" (2018, p. 3), the acute and urgent experience of many students and colleagues is of geography's colonial legacy and present, of hostility to those from working class or financially disadvantaged backgrounds, of the contemporary discipline's overwhelming whiteness and institutionalised racist/colonial narratives, and the racialisation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and colleagues, and the belittling of their work and working practices (Desai, 2017; Esson, 2018; Esson & Last, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Tolia-Kelly, 2017). The necessity of anti-racist pedagogies at universities (Esson & Last, 2020) and schools (Morgan & Lambert, 2001, 2020; Puttick & Murrey, 2020; Tomlinson, 2019) is clear.

As Desai notes, although it was significant that geography was included in the English Baccalaureate in 2015, the discipline has struggled to recruit ethnically diverse students to further study, with the recruitment and attainment of both undergraduates and postgraduates "profoundly differentiated according to race and ethnicity" (2017, p. 322). There is a persistent attainment gap between white and BME students in HE, and between white and BME academics reaching professorial appointment levels (Desai, 2017; Esson, 2018). In schools, while issues for BME students and teachers remain urgent, there is evidence of increasing enrolment of previously more marginalised students, including BME students, in secondary school GCSE Geography entries (RGS, 2019). Strand (2014) demonstrates the varied picture of attainment and the compounding effects in the interaction between social economic status (SES), ethnicity, and gender, and the ongoing policy concerns about the lower attainment of White British low SES boys and Black Caribbean low SES boys.

We argue for alertness to these challenges, especially those that emerge along intersectional lines of social and embodied difference, identity, and privilege. Such lines include, but are not limited to, matters of gender and gender diversity, citizenship and indigeneity, class, race, religious identity and practice, sexuality and queerness, disability, and bodily difference. We can ask: to what extent do all of our students (present and potential) see themselves reflected in existing geography curricula and represented in nuanced ways? Whose places, bodies, voices, and experiences are obscured or privileged? And how might we respond to the dis/advantaging nature of our curricula and pedagogies, and to some educators' and students' relative privileges? To this end, as Esson and Last (2019) propose, we must embrace a "curriculum against domination" – one resistive of practices that maintain and reinforce the exclusion, subordination, and supposed superiority of particular embodied identities and knowledge systems – at all levels of geography education. Although Daigle and Sundberg draw attention to the difficulties of enacting decolonial pedagogical praxis and curriculum-making, they argue that the discipline "will retain its Eurocentricity, coloniality and whiteness unless all geographers begin to

do the anti-racist and decolonial work historically done by Indigenous, people of colour, women and queer faculty and students" (2017, p. 340).

These heritages and the contemporary challenge raise significant pedagogical issues that must be negotiated with urgency across all levels and spaces of geographical education, and in the composition of groups such as GeogEd. We can be led by the scholarship of those most affected by current dominant practices in geography and geography education (Noxolo, 2017, p. 318), noting, for example in the UK, the work of the Race, Culture and Equality (RACE) working group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) and collectives such as @ blackgeogorg. In the next section we turn to the role GeogEd, alongside other groups, might play in providing spaces for exchange between the three particular communities of practice we identify.

3.3 | The space of the prism

The heritages and challenges we have highlighted inform the renewed "spaces between" communities of practice for exchange, reflection, and challenge. A characteristic of communities of practice is the potential for peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and, through this, to have access to mature practice. GeogEd, in enabling spaces of exchange, facilitates interaction not only between early career and established colleagues within a community but also between communities. It can work as a creative borderland space (Hill et al., 2016) that destabilises static roles of "novices" and "experts," since experts in one community of practice may be novices in another (Fuller, 2007). For example, those researching the geographies of education might have limited understanding or experience of school curriculum design but might bring considerable resources to understanding how variation in and between school spaces will affect how curricula are enacted and the ends to which they are put. By extending the group's explicit remit, GeogEd's activities hold potential to create spaces for mutual learning and dialogue across the borders of its communities of practice. Given the challenges faced, and the heritages we work with, we suggest that these spaces of exchange must be characterised by an ongoing commitment to reflective practice and to compassionate and courageous pedagogy (Hill et al., 2019) that challenge socio-spatial and educational injustices. We turn to briefly consider each of the communities of practice envisaged by the shift to GeogEd (Figures and 2, and summarised in Table 1) and without precluding further change or connections.

3.4 | Geographies of education

The geographies of education community is concerned with the domain of education and the practice of geographic research. That is to say, in using the conceptual and procedural knowledge of geography in conversation with cognate work, such as the sociology of education and education studies (on a spatial turn in education studies see Taylor, 2009). As addressed more fully in the paper on the rise of the geographies of education in this special section (Kraftl et al., 2022) and writing on the critical geographies of education (Nguyen et al., 2017; Pini et al., 2017), this work considers geographical approaches to understanding education and learning in all of its diverse spatial forms, actors, and mobilities, and both in being shaped by and shaping the relationships between political-economies, social-cultural life, and environments.

Kučerová et al. (2020) trace a 60-year history of this work in their international perspective on the institutionalisation of these geographies. In addition to presentations at geography conferences (such as the RGS-IBG and American Association of Geographers [AAG] annual conferences), and in streams at cognate events such as those of the British Educational Research Association, there have been specialist gatherings such as the International Conference on Geographies of Education at Loughborough University in 2010, 2012, and 2018. The formalisation of this work through institutional spaces has also taken place through the formation of such groups as the Critical Geographies of Education Specialty Group (CGE-SG) in the AAG.

TABLE 1 The communities of practice being brought together through GeogEd

Community	Domain	Practices including:
Geographies of education	Education	Geographic research
Geography education	Geography	Teaching and curriculum-making research
Pedagogic research	Education	Teaching and learning research

This work brings to the fore a sense of the contemporary and historic diversity and specificity of differing spatial forms, social relations, flows, and inequalities evident across different sites of education and learning. Learning and debates about (geography) curriculum and pedagogy are set, through this research, into a wider context attentive to the interplay of structures and agencies that frame education and learning. We hope to see continued evidence of co-organising and research in this area across the sub-disciplines of geography within both the RGS-IBG and international research groups (West et al., 2022).

3.5 | Geography education

Geography education is concerned with the domain of geography and, for the purposes of this paper, we focus on the practice of research about teaching and curriculum-making (Lambert et al., 2015). Geographers continually induct students into the ideas and methods of the discipline (Lambert, 2010), both to support and enable future research in the discipline and also because of the intrinsic value of geography to a person's education (Bustin, 2019; Maude, 2016). While geographers in HE have collaborated through groups like HERG and the Teaching Support Network Subject Centre for Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences (LTSN-GEES), it has been common to find those who work and research in the field of geography education located in education departments in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Butt, 2020) or schools. Much of the teaching done by this community is at the school level and/or focused on (initial) teacher education, with research often focused on school geography (see, for example, Geography Education Research Collective [GEReCo] website; International Geographical Union – Commission on Geographical Education [IGU-CGE], 2016).

Within the geography education community of practice, there are communities within communities. As Hammond and McKendrick (2020) highlight with regards to the geography teacher educator (GTE) conference in 2019, despite the fragmentation of initial teacher education that has occurred in England, those who attend this conference work primarily in HEIs. Although conferences in geography education often serve specific communities (such the Geographical Association (GA), Scottish Association of Geography Teachers, the IGU-GCE, the RGS-IBG, or the Charney Manor conference), there is border crossing between these spaces.

By recognising geography education as a broader community of practice, while acknowledging its diversity, we aim to highlight areas of research and debate within geography education, and between geography education and the other communities of practice. These include consideration of different functions of, and relationships between, geography in the academy and geography as a school subject (as they are, have been, and might be) (Lambert, 2014) with regards to the processes and purposes of the recontextualisation of knowledge (Bernstein, 1996; Finn, forthcoming; Firth, 2018; Healy & Walshe, 2021), and the transitions students make between schools and HE/FE (Tate & Hopkins, 2019).

3.6 | Pedagogic research

The pedagogic research community is concerned with the domain of education and the practice of research about teaching and learning. This grouping is less self-consciously subject-specific than the geography education community as it is made up of both geographers and those from other disciplines/subjects. It is a matter of debate – certainly within school curricula (Young et al., 2014) – as to whether it is possible or desirable to take a more "generic" or skills-focused perspective on learning separate from the knowledge domain or discipline in which the pedagogy is enacted. In the UK context, in HE, its foci coalesce around the banners of pedagogic research, education research, or the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and through UK events such as the Society for Research into Higher Education and Enhancing Student Learning Through Innovative Scholarship (ESLTIS) conference. More broadly, this research and scholarship emerges from engagement by educators with pedagogy. Where geographers have been involved, it has often (but not always) focused on more generic issues of pedagogy as they play out in geography, such as group work, or the skills agenda, rather than seeking to articulate a vision for geography in education. GeogEd provides this group with a space for disseminating research and supporting the development of pedagogic practice and we see this as being enriched through exchange with the other two communities of practice.

The transition to the GeogEd research group draws attention to the distinctive contributions of each of these communities of practice, but also to the intent to purposefully promote and enable exchange, reflection, and challenge in "the spaces between" these communities. In the following section we take the idea of the spaces of exchange that can be created across and between these groups and consider what this might mean for future research and practice.

4 | DIRECTIONS OF TRAVEL

4.1 | Geography's communities

In this section we consider potential avenues that might arise from GeogEd as a space of exchange between different communities of practice. We consider explicit inclusions named in the change from HERG to GeogEd, and issues that become more visible through the interaction of the different communities of practice.

First, the change from HERG to GeogEd signalled two moves that were in continuity with HERG but that were made explicit and have led to new ways of framing the group's history (Healey et al., 2022; West et al., 2022). That is the expansion to provide named space for those who research the geographies of education (Kraftl et al., 2022) and for those in non-HE geography education. This move has already seen new members join the GeogEd group[3] and the committee from these communities of practice and is evident in the proposed sessions for the postponed 2020 RGS-IBG annual conference. These moves achieve three important goals. With respect to geographies of education, they provide institutional support – alongside existing research groups – to resource and make this work visible and connect new and existing researchers. With respect to those beyond HE-focused geography education, GeogEd promotes and enables "border-crossing" between school and university geography (Castree et al., 2007), signalling openness and interest in these endeavours. Finally, the change allows for greater examination of the relationships between geography education and geographies of education, with a focus on challenging inequalities.

This openness is vital for the discipline, not least because the last decade has seen significant GCSE and A Level reform in England, changes that have provided both opportunities and challenges for teachers (Kinder et al., 2022). The core content devised by the A Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) geography group, with significant academic input, led to the introduction of new A Level content, especially in relation to human geography (Rawling, 2015). Local geography networks connect some teachers and academics linking subject-based research to curricular content to enable teachers to "update" their subject knowledge in relation to new geographical content (including through GA local branches, and the RGS-IBG). In addition, some funded research, such as the GeoCapabilities project (now in its third phase) and Young People's Geographies project (2006–2011), have been important spaces of school and university exchange. However, the limits to sustained collaboration across the school–university educational border remains concerning, despite recent years having been a critical moment of change. Expanding the opportunities to learn from and work with people across communities of practice allows us to think more in terms of the school–university interface (beyond the notion of a divide; Butt & Collins, 2018).

Geography teachers can and are undertaking educational research to inform their teaching practice just as teaching-focused academics have done (Brooks, 2018; Firth & Brooks, 2018; Hill et al., 2018; Solem & Boehm, 2017). We propose that teachers and their university counterparts share their pedagogical expertise and practices, ensuring that together educators identify and design teaching practices in geography, and develop geographically focused educational research to enrich and enhance school, undergraduate, and postgraduate geography education. Furthermore, developments in pedagogic research and the learning sciences provoke new questions about the geographies of learning (and beyond formal sites of education), especially around the intersection of cognitive science and computational governance (Williamson et al., 2017).

Indeed, at the intersection of geography education and education's geographies, we can pose a variety of questions, such as how students navigate their geographical journey through school, and in some cases to university, and beyond. Given spatial differences in access to education and education outcomes (Dorling, 2020), and the issues we noted in the "Contemporary Challenges" section above, we can ask how geographies of education can impact access to, and engagement with, geographical education and knowledge in schools, HE, and FE. Further, while there has been a focus on the geography "pipeline" or pathways, (where and how students come to continue in progressive stages of geographical education) and student transitions (Tate & Hopkins, 2019), we argue that there is more work to do to understand students' "exit points" from geographical study, and how students use their geographical knowledge and skills beyond, and after, their studies. Similarly, the importance of prior learning experiences, as something that shapes undergraduates' approach to their university studies, is too often overlooked (although see, for example, Tate & Swords, 2013). Linking communities will be beneficial for geography teachers and academics, as a cross-fertilisation of practices will inform and enhance geographical teaching and learning.

Finally, we argue that there are areas of thinking and practice being developed by those involved in geography education research that could inform debate and reflection in the geography community more broadly. One such intervention has been through the notion of GeoCapabilities (Bustin, 2019; GeoCapabilities website; Uhlenwinkel

et al., 2016), which considers how geography offers a distinctive contribution to a person's education and the development of the educated person. By applying ideas from economist Amarta Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum on the "capabilities approach" to education, GeoCapabilities advocates the transformative potential of engagement with what Young (2008) terms "powerful knowledge" in ensuring access to a progressive form of discipline-orientated teaching in schools (Lambert et al., 2015) – as distinct from "knowledge of the powerful." Whilst Lambert et al. (2015) assert that a GeoCapabilities approach offers "transformative potential: for providing (school) students with access to academic thought on geography, there has been limited discussion by academic geographers (though see Walkington et al., 2018), and with students of geography, as to the value of these ideas. Indeed, to return to the challenges we raised earlier, in the context of social difference and oppressive experiences in the discipline and spaces of formal education, there is a risk that this potential will remain unrealised for certain students and in certain educational spaces.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have engaged with the question of how we understand the constitution of, and porosity between, different communities of practice: here, those engaged in the geographies of education, geography education, and pedagogic research. We see particular value in the transition to the GeogEd research group of renewed spaces of exchange between these groups, alongside other communities of practice. Although developing spaces and practices for such exchanges will be challenging and will require negotiation of differences in language use, priorities, and approaches, the benefit is enriched dialogue with potential to benefit the wider disciplinary community and the next generation of geography students and academics.

In outlining different challenges we recognise that there is much to do. We acknowledge the complex heritages received from generations of geographer-educators and recognise the contributions from the diverse range of communities of practice that are stakeholders in the shared domains of geography and education. While aspects of this work are not new, they can be renewed. Indeed, renewal is a necessity if the progressive social reproduction of the discipline is to continue. We welcome discussion and engagement and invite readers to contribute to (or productively disrupt) these emerging and renewed conversations.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No new data were created for this submission.

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ENDNOTES

[1] 'We' include those working in geography departments, sometimes allied or combined with related disciplines such as earth sciences; 'geographers at large', such as two of the authors who work in business schools; in schools of education; and in schools – and those who work across these spaces. We hold identities as human and physical geographers; school teachers; those involved in teacher education; academics on both research and teaching, and teaching-focused contracts; PhD researchers; and staff on fixed-term and open-ended contracts. Despite our diversity,

we are also mindful of those absent, and absented, from these discussions and that the 'we' who speak do so from specific locations and subject positions. As a writing collective, we are white and notably Anglocentric, and do not wish to discount or diminish other issues that could be raised from alternative (and perhaps more diverse) viewpoints. This paper is therefore offered in a spirit of ongoing dialogue.

[2] There were 40 participants at the launch event for the conference, including attendees from all the UK nations and a minority from beyond the UK. Participant affiliations have been inferred after the event and some participants might identify in more than one group: approximately half were academic staff who are 'geography-aligned' and found in a variety of departments; just over one in ten were academic staff who are 'education-aligned', most of whom work in education departments; just over three in ten were PhD students and most of these where based in geography departments, with a minority based in education departments. Other attendees included those working as academic developers, teachers, and those from publishing and subject associations.

[3] As of August 2020, there are 179 members affiliated with the group, up from 165 in 2019 and 146 in 2018.

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