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# Spirituality, football and Olivia: how connectedness inspires hope through difficult situations

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## ABSTRACT

On 22 August 2022, Olivia Pratt-Korbel, a nine-year-old English girl, was mistakenly shot by a masked gunman in Liverpool, U.K. Less than a week later at a football match played at the home ground of Liverpool Football Club, the whole crowd stood to its feet to applaud the life and memory of this local youngster. This was an incredibly moving and spiritual experience of connectedness and solidarity. This article, underpinned philosophically by both Buber's 'I-Thou' and Heidegger's *Being-in-the-world* considers how such a tragic experience might allow individuals to express unity through adversity, and how those invested in children's spirituality might draw on the tools of identity, remembering and meaning-making in promoting inclusion and belonging. It is also suggested how educators might draw on difficult situations to inspire a pedagogy of hope, which allows for creativity and criticality, and ultimately, transformation.

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## Introduction

On 22 August 2022, Olivia Pratt-Korbel, a nine-year-old English girl, was mistakenly shot by a masked gunman in Liverpool, U.K. The incident took place in her own home, involving criminals unconnected to her family or community. She died later that day. This horrific event sent shock waves not only across her neighbourhood, but across the city and country. The tragedy prompted defiant messages from residents, politicians and prominent local figures condemning the violence and appealing for information concerning the attack to be shared with police. The investigation has since concluded (Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner 2023) but Olivia remains to be a part of the consciousness of the people of Liverpool (Liverpool Echo, 30 March 2023).

On 27 August 2022, less than a week after the shooting, a football match took place between Liverpool and Bournemouth at Anfield, the home ground of

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Liverpool Football Club. This became a memorable event, not least due to the 9–0 score line, but significantly for the tribute paid to Olivia. On the 9th minute, the whole crowd stood to its feet to applaud the life and memory of this local youngster, to whom many was a stranger. Following this, the ground resounded with the words of the Liverpool anthem sung by the whole assembly – ‘walk on with hope in your heart, and you’ll never walk alone’ (McSherry 2022). This was an incredibly moving and spiritual experience, evidenced through how supporters of both teams felt connected through their common expression of support and grief.

This sense of connectedness was highlighted through the local media. As stated in the Liverpool Echo (27 August 2022), the crowd ‘rose in union’ to applaud Olivia – an example of solidarity that was replicated days later at Goodison Park when Liverpool played against local rivals Everton (BBC 2022). This sense of collective consciousness, recognised by Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp (Liverpool Echo, 27 August 2022) as how the people of the city ‘stand together’ in times of adversity, was also evidenced through the display of banners bearing the slogan ‘Enough is enough: Our city in unity’ (The Guardian, 3 September 2022). The eschewing of rivalry in that moment of remembrance ([twitter.com/btsportfootball](https://twitter.com/btsportfootball)) again reflected Klopp’s assertion that this human tragedy is ‘a subject of much, much more importance’ (Liverpool Echo, 27 August 2022). This is unity expressed through adversity.

Connectedness is a concept central to children’s spirituality. Indeed, spirituality is summarised by Hyde as ‘meaning and connectedness’ (2008, title page). This simple phrase includes the understanding that when an individual is connected to both self and other, meaning can be made concerning one’s life experiences. Through connectedness it is possible to develop resilience, well-being and a sense of purpose. This is underlined by other authors such as Wills (2011), de Souza (2012), Adams et al. (2015) and Gellel (2018), who similarly promote spiritual connectedness as being significant to children’s personal development and search for meaning.

Disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry acknowledge the value of connectedness following adversity; for example, Spaniol (2002) promotes the idea that connectedness to self and others can be seen as part of a recovery from trauma, loss or illness. Furthermore, in recent writings concerning the darker side of spirituality (de Souza 2012; Lovelock and Adams 2017), authors prioritise spiritual connectedness as a means of confronting personal trauma. Yet less literature is available concerning the expression of connectedness through adversity within educational settings and there is little available that concerns a collective response to grief. Furthermore, as such tragedies sadly have become a regular news feature not only in the U.K. but beyond, it is incumbent upon teachers and child-care professionals to undertake careful reflection on such events in the classroom. Whilst such reflection falls within established criteria for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education in

England and Wales (Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills] 2021), it is important to note that educating spiritually is also a personal process, requiring practitioners to consider the dimension of learning that occurs within children's personal lives, beyond given learning criteria and expected outcomes. Therefore, encouraging teachers to embrace difficult situations as a spiritual learning experience is necessary in promoting a pedagogy of hope for the future.

In the light of the collective response made to the tragedy of Olivia, this article considers three questions:

- What is the philosophical basis for a consideration of connectedness as experienced in Liverpool and how might this be recognised as an intrinsic aspect of children's spirituality?
- What spiritual tools might educators draw upon in order to embrace difficult issues with children?
- How might practitioners then support learners in navigating a precarious, ever-changing world situation?

As a conceptual piece, the argument here is not derived from data gained through empirical research methodologies, but the assimilation and evaluation of existing theories and concepts from within the literature of children's spirituality, philosophy, and critical pedagogy. This approach, described by Jaakkola (2020) as *focal theory*, intends to explore the questions raised in order to provide a new perspective for children's spirituality and practical support for teachers and practitioners.

## Connectedness

Whilst the notion of connectedness features within much of the literature of children's spirituality, in the light of the event outlined above it is suggested here that the impact of connectedness expressed as unity and solidarity through adversity might be experienced on a deeper level than what is sometimes referred to as a connection between self and other (Hyde 2008). Therefore, such exploration requires a philosophical starting point.

According to Buber (1970), two expressions of relation are in evidence as connectedness: 'I-Thou', where there is no distinct definition between self and other within a conceptual space, and 'I-It', in which the self is positioned dualistically alongside others to set up a separation or division. Characterised as 'us and them' and reinforced through language, form, representation and actualisation, Buber argues that the 'I-It' relation pertains to a product, within which the self is detached from its authentic state. His suggestion is that by objectifying the relationship, bringing it into the open world by which it becomes defined with boundaries, self then becomes alien to self and other,

and what is in between 'becomes negligible' (Buber 1970, 63), in other words, lacks meaning. In this case, football club allegiances determine the boundaries by which the self and other are separated, and whilst reinforcing a sense of belonging, such divisions have also in the past led to violence and criminal behaviour ([www.skysports.com/football/news](http://www.skysports.com/football/news) 5 August 2019).

However, the 'I – thou' relation locates the world of connectedness *within* the individual as an ontological state, rather than *between* the self and other; thus, the idea of 'other' as 'thou', outside of space and time, is undefined. What is significant here is Buber's notion of this undefined relation being *a priori*. He writes: 'in the beginning is the relation – the category of being, as readiness', which is summed up as 'the innate You' (Buber 1970, 78). This indicates how before divisions are formed, all humans relate existentially. Therefore, in moments of connectedness such as those experienced in Liverpool during August and September 2022, humans might once again return to this *a priori* relational state, which Buber suggests is a primary human longing. Unity, which in this case was inspired by tragedy, signals a response to the dimension that exists prior to actualisation.

Connectedness therefore has an ontological foundation which starts with an understanding of spirituality as an aspect of Being. To cite Heidegger (1962), for whom Being is *pre*-ontological, this foundation relates to the prior and uncontingent state that belongs to all people before form or subjective representation. It provides the starting point for the existential potentiality-for-Being understood by Heidegger as *Dasein*. Founded on this prior ontological state, connectedness concerns the relatedness of others in their own potentiality-for-Being within a non-corporeal space termed Being-in-the-world. Since the 'world' as presented here is not a defined space but rather understood as the open-ness of Being (Heidegger 1978), and as it is neither concerned with physical encounter nor definition (Heidegger 1962), within it resides the potentiality for unity that transcends the divisions imposed by borders and boundaries and allows for a range of new possibilities and understandings.

For Heidegger, as Buber, self and other are not 'alongside' each other as entities, but 'in-the-world' existentially. Continuing this idea, Gergen writes: 'we come into life through relationship. We exist in a state of inter-animation' (Gergen 2009, 34). Thus, within an understanding of Being-in-the-world, there is no separation, just relation. In response to this, it might be considered that in Liverpool, as the football crowds rose to their feet to applaud the life of Olivia, the definitions of football identity and the separation that would normally ensue were transcended in an experience of Being-in-the-world which in that moment promoted unity – a standing together to reflect on something beyond the immediacy of rivalry.

According to de Souza (2010a), this is an expression of 'Ultimate Unity', which she posits is a unique state considered to be the deepest level of connectedness, where individuals experience becoming one with other. She

also contends that en route to Ultimate Unity, spiritual connectedness might be characterised by a continuum, along which a sense of authentic relationship between self and other presents as empathy with others who are 'not us', as well as a sense of compassion with and for those with whom we are not already familiar. In this sense, a deep connectedness might be experienced across a group of strangers such as those in the football crowds, which can be in that moment, meaningful. This is followed up by Hyde who in consideration of the concept of the 'felt sense' (Hyde 2008), suggests that in shared experiences and activities such as singing, self and other 'as it were, become one' (Hyde 2008, 91). Again, in reference to the act of solidarity expressed through singing and applause in the football crowds, the level of connectedness across two groups of people who are 'not us' was tangible to all present ([twitter.com/btsportfootball](https://twitter.com/btsportfootball)).

Yet it is also suggested here that such connectedness, and even unity, can beyond the present moment become transformational. As suggested by Heidegger (1962), this kind of experience promotes new understandings, leading to a new way of thinking and behaving. Thus, according to de Souza (2010b), this connectedness can affect one's actions and motivations, as well as the way one perceives the world. Fletcher (2016) drawing on de Souza, identifies acceptance, compassion and belonging as attributes of connectedness that might be brought forward into the future. Hay and Nye (2006) also point towards the significance of the elemental human quality of spirituality as being the inspiration for altruism. When the ontological foundation of relationship with others is acknowledged, even beyond care and concern, there is a sense that when one person or group is 'damaged', this has an impact on the wider community of other.

Furthermore, connectedness often inspires unity in diversity and so can be a powerful tool for an act of coming together which transcends religion, politics, race, gender and other such positions. This then establishes a concern for inclusion and the erosion of difference, the opposite of which unfortunately is becoming more prevalent as a societal norm. Connectedness paves the way for a deeper understanding of acceptance through the primal experience of unity in diversity. This is no less evidenced in the history of the city of Liverpool, and the various points at which tragedy has brought unity. For example, fans of both Liverpool and Everton unite on a yearly basis to remember the 97 victims of the Hillsborough disaster who died following a crush during the side's FA Cup match on 15 April 1989. More recently, members of the four football clubs based in Merseyside (Liverpool, Everton, Tranmere Rovers and Marine) 'put aside old rivalries' to promote a message against knife crime in the area ([www.tranmererovers.co.uk/news](http://www.tranmererovers.co.uk/news)). As much as rivalries form part of the identity of the city, the *a priori* sense of Being-in-the-world comes to the fore at significant times, to look back and remember but also to challenge for a restored future.

In relation to children's spirituality, reminiscent of Being-in-the-world is David Hay and Rebecca Nye's concept 'relational consciousness' (2006), which akin to a meta-consciousness includes the relationship of the self to four contexts of spirituality: world, self, others and God. The authors posit that this dimension adds value and meaning to immediate experience, leading to a sense of well-being through new understandings of identity and self-awareness. For example, they consider that relational consciousness encourages children to challenge individualism in favour of an identification with 'other'. This promotes inclusion and belonging and negates the alienation provoked by for example, religious or cultural hegemony. Furthermore, Hay and Nye identify how relational consciousness can inspire self-reflection leading to changed attitudes and behaviours. Spirituality then holds a political position, which places children at the centre of their own relationship building and, as in the experience in Liverpool, has the potential to overcome social constraints or prejudice.

Harris (2015) explores the issue of inclusion as an important aspect of children's spirituality. Echoing Buber's notion of 'I-Thou' having 'no borders', she posits that in an inclusive learning environment, all children no matter of difference or disability join together with no barriers in place. This builds a sense of community to develop resilience and experience joy. She believes that both physical and conceptual spaces should be fostered to promote inclusion, be they church, school or community-based: this provision 'can provide safe boundaries in an environment in which all young children can explore their personal, social and spiritual journeys of meaning-making' (2015, p. 168). To be inclusive, Harris writes, is not easy to achieve, but its goal is to reach to the heart of connectedness – to 'deal with what it means to be a human being in all of its complexity' (2015, 167) and bring children to an awareness of their Being-in-the-world. Milton (2021, 185) concurs, suggesting that 'the classroom as a "space" is a meeting point of various cultures, language biographies and identities' and this reflects Misra's assertion that inclusive education 'appreciates differences without othering' (Misra 2021, 244). This promotes a sense of responsibility (Bangert 2014), which again is political, encouraging children to respect difference and contribute to 'living in peace' (Mata-McMahon 2023).

Although there is no data available to support the notion that the moment of unity in Liverpool promoted such a depth of new understandings on the part of the members of the football crowds, it is important to note that Heidegger's philosophy concerns potentiality, therefore one should be open to any level of response. Within an understanding of children's spirituality, the challenge of Being-in-the-world for educators and practitioners concerns the readiness to embrace adversity and provide opportunities for children and young people to negotiate identity, reconsider events of the past, and develop new meanings for the present and future. In this respect, the

discussion turns now to consider the second question posed at the outset: what are the spiritual tools that educators might draw upon in order to embrace difficult issues with children?

### ***Identity, meaning making and remembering***

In her journal article on Wills (2018), Wills identifies identity, remembering and meaning making as tools that educators might use in supporting children in difficult situations. Each is explored here in relation to the question posed above.

#### ***Identity***

As stated earlier, Buber's 'I-Thou' relation (Buber 1970) negates the division which promotes a sense of 'us and them', to facilitate an experience of connectedness that has no borders. Unfortunately, football rivalry is one example of division which creates deeply rooted identities in supporters of all ages and at times allows for animosity. Although a present concern, the sectarian history of between certain clubs also highlights how such division has continued since the late nineteenth century, with its roots in both religious and socio-economic communities (Roberts 2017). On a wider scale, across the globe today, children are growing up increasingly with a knowledge of 'us and them' as a societal norm. They experience difference, since migration and displacement warrant people of different races and cultures living in the same cities, and through the influence of media personalities and some politicians, tolerance and acceptance of the 'other' seems not to be a moral imperative but a personal choice.

According to de Souza (2021, 2), such diversity in communities has reinforced a desire to consolidate identity, 'driven by the need to belong'. She notes that identity determines how one will treat others and suggests that difference is exacerbated by those who gravitate to others who share their race, religion or culture. On the other hand, racism or sectarianism can be intensified by those whose misconception or ignorance lead to indifference or even hostility towards those who are 'not us'. Citing Appiah (2018, in de Souza 2021), she asserts that in order to move away from such a situation, identity must now be reconfigured as an ontological expression of relation, not only to reduce marginalisation, but as witnessed in Liverpool, bring people together. This recognition of self *in* other (Levinas 2004), where each dialogue and learn from the other, can promote unity in diversity, yet with a recognition that identity might become more complex or challenging. In the light of the current discussion, it is suggested here that having a common goal and purpose, such as campaigning against knife crime in Liverpool for example, is a starting point for change and an opportunity to demonstrate solidarity beyond the limitations imposed by 'identity politics' (Fukuyama, 2018, cited in de Souza 2021). Further ideas to support this are offered later in this article.



For children's spirituality, Eade (2019) acknowledges that children and young people often experience a tension between their own self-concept and the identities expected of them by family, community or external agencies. Children might identify as supporters of Liverpool football club, or an opposing club, but they are also gendered, sometimes steeped in the expectations of class or religion, and either privileged or limited by economics. Eade asserts that identities are fluid, changing and multiple, not only due to the influence of popular contemporary figures, but also due to the 'individualistic macro-culture' which fragments communities and homogenous units, and thus, a sense of belonging. At times, the inner identity of a child is at odds with the outward appearance, and this can lead them to attempts to both manage their multiple identities *and* at the same time align with the 'attitudes and expectations of their religious, cultural or preferred gendered identities' (de Souza 2021, 5). As de Souza argues, this can be at the cost to their sense of self-worth, mental, emotional and physical health.

Eade (2019, 7) posits that identities should be 'created slowly and renegotiated over time'. Thus, he proposes that importance is placed upon the role of narrative and personal story in identity formation, and that this should occur within trusting relationships and hospitable environments. This reminds us again of the notion of Being-in-the-world, which as a pre-ontological state accepts each individual in their potentiality-for-Being without definition or subjective representation (1962). Within this space, children's identities as potentiality-for-Being can be developed, nurtured and supported through risk-taking, creativity and the search for meaning (Eade 2019). Such spaces, again as suggested by Harris earlier (2015), are inclusive and welcoming, and whilst not necessarily negating the rituals, symbols or language of host cultures, they nevertheless allow for the opening of 'alternate possibilities' (Eade 2019, 15). It might be suggested then that given the example of football supporters who, whilst maintaining their identity through symbols, songs and merchandise, were yet able to transcend this representation in order to remember Olivia and advocate for safety in the city, so children through personal narrative, collaboration, reflection and social action within a safe space can also negotiate identity without judgement or expectation.

### *Meaning making*

It is Hay and Nye's conjecture (2006) that out of the primal state of relational consciousness, everyday experiences can be the starting point for the consideration of mystery, inspiring a depth of encounter which has the potential to prompt existential questions such as 'why am I here?' as well as the more personal 'why is this happening?' Such existential questioning is particularly pertinent in situations such as the tragedy of Olivia, and whilst answers to why this happened will never satisfy, such events do provide the opportunity

for what Hyde (2008) terms 'spiritual questing'. Through questioning and reflection, 'spiritual questing' opens a space within which learners can wrestle with difficult issues and gain support from others on the same journey. As Fletcher (2016) suggests, this can allow for a sense of searching for purpose in life.

Difficult situations that prompt us to question their meaning or why they have happened can of course lead to anxiety and a feeling of hopelessness, which Tacey (2010, 15) notes as 'a cry for hope in a time of despair'. Yet the search for meaning can also take us to a deeper level of thinking which acknowledges the value of embracing an inner life as well as a consideration of what might be beyond the immediate. Again, according to Tacey (2010), this can lead to a sense of well-being and inner strength. Following his time in Auschwitz, Victor Frankl (2008, 51) wrote about nurturing the inner life so that his spirit could 'transcend that hopeless, meaningless world' to consider the meaning of his sufferings. Similarly, nurturing a child's spiritual life through connectedness with others within a supportive and creative space can, as Harris (2015) notes, develop resilience. Educators must be aware of this.

It is imperative then not only that space is created in which children's voices can be heard, but as Gulamhusein (2021, 237) argues, that teachers and childcare professionals must also be 'steeped in skills of active listening'. Children, she continues, need to share stories, ask questions and offer their experiences and perspectives, and to find creative ways of navigating meaning within their own contexts. Therefore, it is vital that time is taken to reflect on the meaning of difficult situations within a safe space without providing answers or judgements, to allow learners to experience solidarity with others, come to embrace what has happened and consider a way forward.

### *Remembering*

As stated above, the importance of history and remembering the past is significant for the people of Liverpool. There is a sense that going through hard times is part of the story of the city, from its devastation during World War II and times of great poverty to the more recent street violence and inequalities. Every year, the football tragedy of 'Hillsborough' is remembered, and the number 97 is found on the Liverpool shirt to represent each person who died. Liverpool residents also pause to remember the disaster of 1985 in Heysel, Belgium, when 39 fans were crushed as a wall collapsed ([www.liverpoolfc.com/heysel](http://www.liverpoolfc.com/heysel)). Difficulty, it seems, is part of the collective consciousness of people from this city.

It is this sense of history and remembrance that makes the tribute to Olivia so poignant. Remembering how communities have come together in the past to overcome adversity provides a foundation for how to deal with current and future tragedy, and the pride (and humour) of the people overcomes many examples of grief. Again, within a respectful space, children can pause to remember and reflect on past difficulties such as wars or earthquakes, and

through symbols (e.g., building a cairn to remember lives lost), poetry or artwork for example, they can allow such reflection to not only receive comfort but also to confront the present. According to Wills (2018), remembering as a spiritual tool forms part of a critical pedagogy that 'inspires students to wrestle with the complexities and ambiguities' of features of contemporary society such as 'oppression, injustice and exclusion' (2018, 255), and in remembering the past, they are confronted with the big issues that must be explored and critiqued so that such atrocities will never happen again.

Yet it is evident in the political situation in twenty-first century Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine for example, that atrocity does continue to happen. Nevertheless, even in the Primary school classroom, remembering can allow children to recognise similar exclusive behaviours and thereby potentially change their beliefs and actions to mirror the unity expressed during the football games. Wills (2018) identifies that children can recognise bullying or the marginalisation of others as examples of unethical behaviour, and that reflection on this can point towards change. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the wider impact of tragedy for good is not often known and the changes in the lives of individuals and communities following the death of Olivia are yet to be seen.

This then raises questions for spiritual pedagogy. In similar situations, either of personal difficulty, or in response to the tragedies unfolding regularly on the news, it is important for children's spirituality that the opportunity for reflection on such situations is provided. Such an approach here is termed a 'pedagogy of hope' and it is suggested that within the school or other educational setting, teachers and practitioners might engage children and young people with difficult issues in order that they might make meaning in the present for a future hope.

### **A pedagogy of hope**

The notion of a pedagogy of hope is taken from Paulo Freire (1996/2014) who in his text of the same name promotes the idea that critical pedagogy, a concept with which he is associated, must be anchored in practice. It is the promise of hope that motivates and inspires change, which in his case includes wrestling with issues such as exploitation, colonialism and discrimination. As such, he believes that hope, which 'is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle' (2014) should be at the beginning of engaging with difficulty, lest the struggle 'be suicidal' (2014, 3). Pedagogy must make a difference.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/1996) Freire wrote about the limitation of a process of education which involves a transfer of knowledge, described as a 'banking concept'. He reflects further on this in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992, 67) asserting that it is impossible to transfer 'neutral' knowledge without political implication. Rather he promotes the notion of educational agency,

wherein the experience (or remembering) of each learner is understood and accepted as part of a dialogical process, and within a culture of respect (as connectedness), learners and teachers embark on the struggle to make meaning and ask existential questions (spiritual questing), based on hope. He writes: 'Therefore, teaching is a creative act, a critical act and not a mechanical one' (1992, 71).

Similarly, Kierkegaard in *Philosophical Fragments* (1974, 19) proposes that learning is not just about gaining knowledge, but about being transformed through reflection on the meaning of experience. Here the transformational force for learning is 'the God' who prompts learners to be reminded that when they receive the truth and reflect on this in the light of their own contingent experiences, they can be transformed. And it is this transformation that produces hope.

Prior to and in the months following the incident involving Olivia Pratt-Korbel, the world has been shaken by other catastrophic events that have served to induce existential questioning, anxiety and grief. In February 2022, the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops brought war once more to Europe leading many to experience anxiety and fear over what might happen next. Many were killed or displaced and this situation continues with yet no resolution. In February 2023, a devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria again left many dead or displaced and the aftermath of this also continues. In both situations, for both first hand witnesses or for onlookers across the globe, certainly there must have been many feelings of hopelessness and despair. It is important therefore that educators acknowledge such tragedy, and that time is taken to reflect on the meaning of these difficult situations within a safe space (physical or conceptual), without providing answers or judgements, to allow learners to experience (silent) solidarity with others, come to embrace what has happened and consider a way forward.

For school-based education, and from a practical point of view, the arts, sports, communication technology and history are some examples of curriculum areas that promote a safe conceptual space within which meaning-making and remembering can take place. It is through collaborative or reflective activity that children can experience connectedness or solidarity with others, and even possibly a sense of transcendence within the everyday (Hyde 2008). This is even more relevant also in the increasingly individualised society of today, with school targets and performativity measures prevalent.

For example, drawing on events in the local community or wider news, or special landmarks such as Black History Month, Disability Awareness Week or Holocaust Memorial Day, children can explore and reflect on pressing issues in a creative way. Children can explore relevant literature and write or perform their own drama; they might compose music reflecting the life stories of key figures in for example Holocaust history or the Civil Rights Movement. All ideas link in with the National Curriculum for England and Wales (DfE Department for

Education 2014) yet allow for the development of children's potentiality-for-Being (Heidegger 1962), as they explore their ideas and feelings together.

Children also could create posters, graffiti or digital flyers to promote awareness and inclusion, and engage in sports/games that require teamwork and a whole class approach. Sustainability education (Samuelsson 2011) might include creative responses to global events such as the earthquakes, floods and wildfires allowing for children to consider their own practical response. This might provide an encouragement towards personal and social responsibility through junk modelling, researching recycling and developing ideas for fundraising.

Remembering can also play a significant part of History or Religious Education (DfE Department for Education 2014), thinking back to times that have been challenging and to mark their significance in our own personal histories, locally and/or globally. Placing more emphasis on outdoor learning and being involved in activities such as sketching and drawing, planting, games and role play, wild art and storytelling, can serve also to allow children to express their own feelings and views on difficult situations in a setting less formal than the classroom. The outdoor space, as promoted in the U.K. through the *Early Years Foundation Stage* policy (DfE Department for Education 2021) also provides practitioners the opportunity for listening and noticing, so to identify any children who might be struggling and to offer safe spaces for reflection, silence and time alone (Walton 2022).

## Conclusion

Drawing the current discussion to a close, it is important to note that its significance lies in the philosophical underpinning to the notion of connectedness as experienced during the events at the Liverpool football grounds following the tragic shooting of Olivia Pratt-Korbel. As explored, drawing on the theories of Heidegger, Buber and Gergen, it is proposed here that the *a priori* state of I-Thou (Buber 1970), which exists as primal before any separation of subject and object within a pre-ontological expression of Being (Heidegger 1962), might provide the platform for an expression of unity amongst a group whose interests and beliefs sometimes differ. As a human response to a tragedy, the acts of remembering and reflection, as well as the celebration of this child's life, illustrate how an understanding of connectedness within the context of children' spirituality might promote an inclusive pedagogy that can be an occasion for both a sensitive and existential response of the child to self, others and the world (Hay and Nye 2006). This is described here as a pedagogy of hope (Freire 2014).

The curriculum affords many opportunities for practitioners to promote such a pedagogy. It is the conjecture of this article then that whilst difficulties such as the tragedy of Olivia can cause upset, anxiety and fear, it is the experience of

connectedness that might be experienced within a safe space in the classroom or curriculum that can allow children to explore their thoughts and feelings concerning difficult situations and which can bring a sense of personal meaning to all learners. Collaboration expressed through subjects such as music and drama, and an understanding of the significance of teamwork in physical education for example can promote inclusion, whilst addressing the implications of human activity on the world and other human beings through history and geography can raise a critical and self-critical awareness in children concerning their own relationships and behaviours. Literature, art and outdoor learning also can provide a starting point for reflection on culture, identity and remembering, whilst offering a space to ask existential questions is imperative (Webster 2004). As Hart (2003) suggests, children's openness, vulnerability and tolerance for mystery enable them to entertain perplexing and paradoxical questions. Reflecting on events such as those explored here therefore might prompt such responses from children, yet in acknowledging the meaning that can be made through difficult situations, such reflection can inspire a sense of hope.

However, it is essential that educators are themselves educated in how to promote a classroom climate in which such learning and reflection can take place. Therefore further research is required to establish the competency of teachers in this aspect, so to identify training and development needs. Nevertheless, through examples offered here, as well as understanding the value of creating a safe space, both physically and conceptually, teachers might draw on the idea of connectedness and inclusivity to provide learning that is relevant and meaningful to children within a precarious and ever-changing world. In turn this might allow them to make their own responses to the difficulties presented to them through the media and first-hand experience, and accordingly, with a sense of purpose and hope, make a difference.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### **Notes on contributor**

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