This is the published version of a paper published in *Young - Nordic Journal of Youth Research*.

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Original Article

Social, Spatial and Material Conditions for Mattering: Newly Arrived Young Migrants' Possibilities to Matter in Everyday Life in a Swedish School

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Abstract

Mattering as a central part of well-being has not been studied in the context of newly arrived young migrants in Swedish schools. Neither have studies on mattering included material and spatial conditions. This article draws on data collected from ethnographic fieldwork to address this. The theoretical contribution is based on the combination of the concept of mattering with Ahmed's feminist and postcolonial theory of orientation and a critical view of lived experience as social and bodily orientation devices. Combining these theoretical frameworks, we explore social, spatial and material conditions for mattering in newly arrived youths' everyday school lives. The overall outcome of our analysis illustrates that mattering is not only a question of social relations but also related to spatial and material dimensions. A conclusion is that Swedishness as an unspoken norm of whiteness is 'built into the walls' of Swedish schools and that (in)directly discriminates newly arrived young migrants.

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Keywords

Ethnography, mattering, materiality, orientation, spatiality, well-being, young migrants

Introduction

Promoting the health and well-being of newly arrived young migrants is a high priority (Pearlin & LeBlanc, 2001; Wieselgren, 2017). The school has been highlighted as an essential arena for newly arrived young migrants to promote intercultural encounters and, therefore, has a social function (Sharif, 2017; Wigg, 2008). As an essential setting for the student's everyday life, educational environments are related to students' experiences of mattering. Especially during adolescence, the need to matter to others is central to well-being (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

For newly arrived young people to establish themselves in society, which is essential for their future opportunities (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2019), a more sustainable school is needed than what is the case today. Globally, communities and schools have difficulty meeting the needs of newly arrived young migrants (e.g. Block et al., 2014; McMullen et al., 2020). Among ethnicity-related narratives from diverse youth, experiences of prejudice and discrimination were common (Gyberg et al., 2018), and the experience of discrimination is a strong predictor of poor life satisfaction among (im)migrants (Berry et al., 2006). Experiences of discrimination undermine young migrants' well-being (Gyberg et al., 2021; Schmitt et al., 2014). However, a recent study among migrant adolescents in 29 European countries reported that individual-level social support from peers and family and national-level trust protected against poor mental health. The opposite was true for individual-level teacher support (Delaruelle et al., 2021).

Research also shows how minority youths and youths of colour struggle to matter comprehensively within the school (Carey, 2019, 2020). In the context of an increased proportion of young migrants and refugees in schools described as increasingly diverse, researchers are beginning to pay attention to how schools can be made more sustainable. According to Bunar (2016), a sustainable school should provide all youth with equal education despite all interfering contextual factors such as socio-economic and migration background, housing and school segregation. In Sweden, where this study takes place, newly arrived young people older than 15 years attend a programme called Language Introduction (LI) at an upper secondary school. LI is a preparatory education focusing on the Swedish language for young people not qualified for the national programmes (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). Previous research shows how LI contributes to newly arrived youths' sense of orientation and security during the first post-migration period (Hagström, 2018). However, LI has also been criticized for creating exclusion through its physical design and organizational structure. Research shows how the organizational principles that form the basis for LI and education for newly arrived youths are characterized by separation from the ordinary organization of schools (Nilsson Folke, 2017). Newly arrived students are often placed in classes, rooms and sometimes buildings separated from so-called mainstream classes (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020). This division has led to experiences of exclusion and parallel school life among newly arrived youths (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020; Hagström, 2018; Nilsson Folke, 2017; Sharif, 2017).

By parallel school life, we refer to the research in a Swedish context that illustrates how schooling for newly arrived youths is characterized by separation in different ways: temporal, spatial, and above all, social. Studies show how this division creates perceived boundaries and distinctions based on normative Swedishness and, at the same time, exclusive power positions in a society oriented around Swedishness (Hagström, 2018; Mattsson, 2005; Lögdberg et al., 2023). Hagström (2018) calls LI a 'racialized sidetrack' within the Swedish upper secondary school. This separated form of schooling can be compared to what internationally has been called 'refugee-only' schools (Mendenhall et al., 2017). We will discuss how these boundaries affect newly arrived young people's opportunities for mattering in this article. Mattering as a central part of well-being has not been studied with a focus on newly arrived young migrants in Swedish schools. Neither have studies on mattering, which are often dominated by social-psychological perspectives, included how the school's materiality and spatial conditions are essential when mattering is created and, thus, how a newly arrived migrant's orientation influences their sense of mattering.

This article draws on observation and interview data collected from ethnographic fieldwork. We use Ahmed's (2006, 2010) feminist and postcolonial theory of orientation and critical view of lived experience as social and bodily orientation devices, as well as Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) notion of mattering. By combining these theoretical frameworks, we explore social, spatial and material conditions for mattering in newly arrived young migrants' everyday school lives.

Previous Research and Theoretical Starting Points

Mattering is about feeling significant to others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981) and the perception that people (can) make a difference in the world (Elliot et al., 2004; Prilleltensky, 2014). Mattering can be defined as 'the feeling that others depend upon us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension' (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Mattering can also be described through the feeling that others would miss us if we were no longer around (Rosenberg, 1985) and by the need to feel that others appreciate us (Schlossberg, 2009). In an innovative paper, Schlossberg (1989) noted that students' feelings of marginality diminished when they believed that they mattered and were appreciated by others. Similarly, the social support of college friends has been described as a significant predictor of mattering among college students (Rayle & Chung, 2007).

Mattering is linked to statuses, roles and occupational conditions (Schieman & Taylor, 2001), as well as race and ethnicity (Rayle & Myers, 2004) and 'white ideologies' (Carey et al., 2022). For example, mattering and experiences of navigating between main cultures and minority cultures have been put forward as indicators for wellness among minority adolescents (Rayle & Myers, 2004). In a study of how black boys perceive mattering in school, Carey et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of abandoning the reproduction of 'white ideologies' in school, which often dominate educational strategies centred around equality.

The importance of feeling significant – to matter – has also been theoretically examined from the perspective of anti-mattering (Flett, 2018) and through the concepts of marginal and partial mattering linked to immigrant communities (Carey, 2019, 2020), which is particularly relevant for this study. Marginal and anti-mattering

'reflects when one feels insignificant or unworthy of attention', whereas partial mattering indicates that an individual becomes limited in what ways they can matter, for example, due to stereotypical treatment because of ethnic background (Carey et al., 2022, p. 154; Flett, 2018). In line with researchers that emphasize mattering from a cultural, structural and social justice perspective focusing on the institutional context (e.g. Carey et al., 2022; Flett, 2018; Prilleltensky, 2014), we understand mattering as a dynamic concept and acknowledge that individuals have different opportunities to matter. Thus, although *the need* to matter has been described as universal (Flett, 2018), the possibilities to matter differ.

This article assumes that variations in possibilities to matter and forms of mattering are related to structural factors such as age, sex and ethnicity. These affect our positions (e.g. as a teacher or newly arrived youth) and our relationships and interactions with others where mattering is created. To be added, we understand age, gender and race/ethnicity as socially constructed and thus changeable over time and space. In the Swedish setting where this study takes place, race is a controversial and politically charged concept, as ethnicity has been the more commonly used term (Hübinette, 2017). Inspired by critical race theory and whiteness studies, Swedish scholars have come to pay attention to 'Swedishness' as a specific form of whiteness and a privileged position. Passing as Swedish has become equivalent to being white (Hübinette, 2017; Mattsson, 2005). Hübinette and Lundström (2022) describe Swedish society as racially segregated, manifesting itself in housing, work conditions and schools. As will be discussed in this article, segregation and hegemonic notions of Swedishness as whiteness may affect young people's opportunities to matter and develop in the school context.

Mattering, as argued in this article, also depends on contextual factors such as place and everyday life's social and material environment. This article will discuss newly arrived young people's ways of mattering, in the everyday context of a Swedish LI at an upper secondary school, with an outset in the assumption that social, spatial and material conditions for mattering depend on power positions. Ahmed's combination of phenomenology and theories of power (Ahmed, 2006, 2010) is used to explore how positions of power constitute different conditions for and ways of mattering.

A person's orientation is vital for the sense of mattering and, hence, well-being. Orientation is about how an individual experiences the world based on the body and how the body is received in and shaped by everyday life's material and social world. It is about starting points, what an individual turns towards and thereby has access to in the form of opportunities, habits and things (Ahmed, 2006). When an individual is oriented and thus *in line*, they do not notice their surroundings, feel comfortable and their body extends the room (Ahmed, 2006). In line with Ahmed's critical development of the phenomenological concept of orientation, we do not understand orientation as a neutral, general concept. A person experiences the world based on how the body takes or is given place in a specific space, for example, a school. In this way, Ahmed criticizes the previous use of the concept of orientation as starting from a normalized body with things within its reach, which, she explains, is not the case for all. Ahmed (2006, 2010) illustrates this in her research and with examples from Fanon's work of how colonial stories shape bodies and, thereby, what bodies can do. While some bodies can pass unnoticed – read white heterosexual men who constitute the norm – others can be marked and can thus feel *out of line*.

Based on this understanding of mattering, including a power perspective, we analyse school as a place and an institutional context where newly arrived youth orient and re-orient themselves. This means that the school, as an institution, directs attention to the young newcomers and thus shapes their possibilities to matter. Contrary to previous theoretical uses of the concepts of mattering, besides the social dimension, we also include the material and spatial conditions and assume that attention can be directed from and between people *and* through the material. Mattering can thus be created through how the room is organized, directed at certain bodies and how things are within reach for some but not others.

Method and Material

The material for this article consists of field notes from observations and interview data collected from ethnographic fieldwork (for more details, see Lögdberg et al., 2023). The study was conducted with the approval of the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2021-01389).

Research Context and Participants

As mentioned above, school is a crucial arena for newly arrived young people, as they have significant adults and peers to relate to and learn about the receiving society. It is also an arena where young people spend a large part of their everyday lives, consequently affecting their opportunities for mattering in different ways. In addition, Sweden, at the time of the study, after the large influx of refugees in 2015, not only received many migrants but also adopted a new migration policy and has been described as a society in change when it comes to issues of immigration and equality (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2019). These changes – a more restrictive migration policy and increased xenophobia – can affect newly arrived young people's opportunities to matter and their overall well-being and are therefore important areas to study. The political changes can furthermore be related to similar patterns in countries across Europe, which makes the study transferable. It was against this background that the selection of case – newly arrived young people's conditions for mattering in the context of a school in Sweden – was made.

The fieldwork done by the first author was situated in a LI at an upper secondary school. The school was located in a medium-sized Swedish city with comparatively few foreign-born people, which was also reflected in the composition of students. In the academic year 2017, when the fieldwork was carried out, around 15% of the students at the school had a foreign background, including the newly arrived students (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). At the time of the study, approximately 2,500 students attended the entire upper secondary school, and 73 newly arrived students were enrolled in the LI. The participants were newly arrived students ($N = 10$, 16–20 years old), male and female, from Afghanistan, Syria, Kosovo, Somalia and Ethiopia. Seven were unaccompanied refugees, and three had arrived with their families. Four stated they had already received residence permits; one living with family had a temporary work permit; and two indicated that they were in the process of seeking asylum. They come from different

socio-economic backgrounds and with varying school experiences. While some had never attended school before, others had several years of school behind them. One of the participants described that he had attended a special school where they only studied the Quran.

Information about the study was given to the young migrants and the school staff in writing and orally, and written consent was obtained from participants before the study began. The students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without explanation. They were also told that field notes from the observations would be recorded so that individuals could not be identified and that pseudonyms would be used.

Interviews and Observations

As the first author, I spent 20 whole school days on-site (April–June 2017). The study started close to a traditional understanding of mattering as a social psychological concept and relational phenomenon. Thus, the semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author included questions about how the participants perceived themselves to be significant to others and in their everyday environment (cf. Elliott et al., 2004; Marshall, 2001). The interviews also included questions about how the young people experienced life in and out of school and how they experienced their well-being. All 10 participants took part in one formal interview that lasted, on average, 40 minutes, followed by several more informal conversations with the participants in daily school life. The interviews took place individually within the school. We communicated in Swedish at the request of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the informal conversations were recorded as field notes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

While the interviews captured the youths' narrated experiences, the observations contributed to capturing body movements in the room and the complexity of relationships, such as the dynamics between students and between students and teachers. They were thus used as an essential supplement to the interviews. The observations were mainly done during lessons, but I also participated in excursions outside the school premises and spent time with the students on breaks and lunches. At first, the observations were more explorative. They became more attentive as I got to know the field and the participants, focusing on how the young people moved in school, 'in the room', interacting with others and the physical environment. I observed how social, material and spatial boundaries arose in everyday life. For example, I observed how symbolic boundaries were drawn between 'Swedes' and young people from 'other countries' and how the materiality of the school affected and reinforced these. I also observed how the room was designed, what was on the walls, what resources were available, such as literature, and for whom.

The time spent with the young people also enabled me to understand the nuances of the relationships and frictions that were not captured in the interview situations. In the field notes, a distinction was made between the concrete and the emotional record (cf. Mauthner, 2002). The concrete record refers to descriptions of what is happening and the physical environment. I described situations where the 'mood in the room' changed in the emotional record, and I tried to capture the students' emotional expressions. The emotional record has been helpful to analyse situations

where the young people expressed, or when I observed, that they felt comfortable and uncomfortable and hence *in or out of line*. Furthermore, it has been beneficial to make visible and reflect on how my positioning may have affected the participants. Thus, the young people's narratives are understood as constructed concerning my presence and influence through my different (attributed and self-ascribed) positions such as 'Swedish', 'woman' and 'a representative of the majority society'. My background as a Swede – and in the context implied whiteness – was emphasized in everyday school life by teachers and students. I believe the position as a white, middle-class, Swedish female researcher gave me access to move over the school premises and to 'blend in' at school (cf. Ahmed, 2006). Hence, I was included in the school's whiteness norms, with the risk that I also reproduced them. Furthermore, this position allowed me as a researcher to understand whiteness and its associated 'Swedishness', as the norm of the school. As shown in this study, this is the norm in which 'otherness' was understood and organized in relation to. I identified how borders were drawn based on Swedishness and where I could pass as Swedish. I noticed how this position was constructed and regarded as desirable. At the same time, this position may have restricted my ability to see certain patterns in my material, for example, expressions of everyday racism and its many forms.

Analysis

As a common procedure in ethnographic fieldwork, the material's creation and analysis were intimately connected (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The practical work with the analysis followed the phases of a thematic analysis and included the steps of getting to know the material, generating codes, forming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The description of the analytic procedure may look like a linear process. Still, the analysis involved back-and-forth analysis between different parts, and the whole proceeding was characterized by a cyclical movement between the categorized empirical data and analytical concepts derived from the article's theoretical perspective. As described above, a greater focus came to be directed towards spatiality and materiality both on-site and in the analysis, where Ahmed's theories of orientation were combined with theories of mattering. The field notes were shared and discussed with the fourth author throughout data collection and later with the second and third authors. I (the first author) mainly conducted the analysis but discussed it with the three other authors throughout the analytic phases. The discussion of the analysis was ongoing until a consensus was reached to ensure the quality of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

How Mattering Was Made Possible and Hindered by the Social, Spatial and Material Conditions

In the following, we will illuminate how mattering was made possible and hindered by the social, spatial and material conditions in the newly arrived youth's everyday life with the school in focus. The first two themes, *Inside the Classroom* and *Outside the Classroom*, emphasize the spatial and social conditions for mattering and how these are reflected in each other. The last theme, *On the Walls,* illustrates how the

material is essential when mattering is created through the available opportunities and how visual messages or posters influence the participants' sense of being in (or out of) line.

Inside the Classroom

During the time I spent with the young people on LI, I observed that they spent most of their school day with other newly arrived youth in their shared classrooms. They lunched with their classmates and spent breaks together. The spatial and temporal separation of bodies into the 'newly arrived' and the so-called 'ordinary students,' usually referred to as 'Swedish students' by both teachers and students in LI, was evident. The school's everyday life was organized and divided into teaching aimed at newly arrived students and teaching aimed at so-called 'regular' classes, students who were eligible for upper secondary school (e.g. Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2020; Hagström, 2018; Nilsson Folke, 2017). As we will show, this spatial organization with separate classrooms had consequences for the newly arrived young people's opportunities for mattering.

Several youths highlighted the classroom context, with the closeness to and the support from the teachers, as the best thing about school. Hamed and Leah, who have both attended school before, Hamed in Afghanistan and Leah in Syria, speak appreciatively of the teachers and their commitment. Hamed explained how he 'gets energy' from one of his teachers. He said, 'She comes to us and says, "Just read and work hard," and so it is with this: work hard with Swedish. She gives energy.' Leah, like many others, took her starting point compared to how her schooling had been before and described that:

> The teachers are better here. They understand us, and they explain more. That's not the case there [in Syria]. They are not interested in the students. It's just better here /…/ They are very kind. They explain three times or four times if you want if you do not understand.

Similar to Hamed and Leah's experiences of the teachers being interested in and engaging with them, others described the importance for their well-being to feel that someone cared about them and what was happening to them now and in the future, illustrating how the teachers contributed to the young people's sense of social mattering (cf. Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). In this way, relationships with the teachers and other newly arrived students could occur in the school's everyday life. Thus, social mattering was made possible inside the walls of the classroom. At the same time, the relations with the teachers were not frictionless, as the observational material shows, and there were daily negotiations about the young people's position in school and assumed future position in society that arose at the intersection between Swedishness and being an immigrant.

Thus, the school context also came to assume other meanings in relation to other students at school, something that the newly arrived young people reflected on. For example, Najib reflected on the absence of Swedish young people inside the classroom and how that, combined with his housing situation, meant that he did not have contact with, as he described, Swedish people. This situation was not unique to Najib but applied to many of the newly arrived youths. Through the school's

spatial organization, social mattering was made possible internally within the group of newly arrived youths and in relation to the Swedish-born teachers whom the newly arrived youths emphasized as necessary and for some the only Swedish contacts. However, the school, and as in this case in combination with a similar restrictive housing situation, can be understood as a physical place that conditions how young people can matter to others through the bodies they physically encounter. Furthermore, the spatial distance was also reinforced socially and discursively through daily conversations that focused on differences between how young Swedes are and how the newly arrived young migrants are.

Outside the Classroom

Outside the classroom, in the school's common areas, such as the entrance to the school, the dining room, the corridors and the stairwell, the students in different classes passed each other daily but rarely met. The school's spatial division with separate classrooms also had consequences in other parts of the school. It impacted the newly arrived young people's experiences of their place at school and how they mattered to other students. Hence, the spatial separation had social consequences. The newly arrived youths stated that creating relationships with students outside of LI was difficult for them. Thus, it was difficult to identify opportunities to feel that they mattered to them. At the same time, they emphasized these relationships as crucial to them. Relations with Swedish peers were highlighted as necessary in several ways. The most central was the feeling that you were part of Swedish society, a community, and several young people wanted to meet a Swedish partner. Also, many emphasized that getting to know Swedes was fundamental for learning the Swedish language and for understanding taken-for-granted cultural skills, which was described as important for them to orient themselves in everyday life. This emerged in the conversation with Petrus:

> Through language introduction, you only get Swedish. But /…/ in Sweden, there are many rules. How to walk. How to cycle. Where to cycle. When can you play music? Where to throw the rubbish. Right? If I had not been with the Swedes, I would not get this information. That's why we must get everything. At school, a Swedish lesson, just about society and rules. From the beginning, you must learn. It's hard if you do not know.

For Petrus, getting to know Swedes meant having access to the taken-for-granted cultural knowledge that affects the feeling of orienting oneself in everyday life, knowing how to spatially move the body to create a sense of being in line. However, it was not only about being able to understand and learn cultural habits and norms; but the young people's stories were also about being able to pass and be accepted as 'normal' youth. Petrus described how he experienced many prejudices and, similarly to other participants, described a fear of being perceived differently, both in terms of appearance and cultural habits. This sense of bodily and social orientation created insecurity among the young newcomers, not least at 'meetings with 'Swedish' peers. The school organized meetings between the newly arrived students and the mainstream classes on a few occasions. These occasions were essential and coveted for the newly arrived students, but at the same time, they gave rise to conflicting feelings that emerged in my conversation with Aaron:

Aaron says that he would like to get to know more Swedes, but he does not dare to speak Swedish, and Swedes do not return his greetings, so he becomes insecure about greeting or befriending them. Aaron tells of a collaboration with a Swedish class; they talked when in the classroom, but never outside. On the street, they do not greet. If it's a girl I can understand but a guy, why does he not want to be friends? (Field notes).

Although these occasions, when the newly arrived youths met other students at the school who did not go to LI, were significant for many of them, these meetings could also contribute to a feeling of being out of line, and of not mattering to the Swedish students. In Aaron's narrative, disorientation arises when young Swedish people do not want to talk to him outside the classroom and organized activities. Najib described in a similar way how these encounters created nervousness:

Najib: It would be good if we had more students from Sweden.

Interviewer: Yes. It would be more mixed.

N: We've only been with them for an hour. Not so much.

I: Did you have a lesson together?

N: Yes.

I: What was that lesson?

N: It was a discussion question, but it was before.

…

I: Okay, how was it then? How was that hour?

N: It was good, but I have talked to the Swedes about the subject, which was a matter of discussion, but they said nothing. It was just us.

I: They said nothing? Was it just you talking?

N: Yes. It was just us.

I: Mm. Would you like to do it again but with more time?

N: Well. You get nervous. But if we were more together than in a lesson.

I: That it would be more natural then?

N: Yes.

In connection with meetings with students outside of the LI, several newly arrived youths expressed nervousness and concern about 'what will they think of us?' This concern was expressed both in terms of looking and behaving differently compared to other young people, and there is a risk that this anxiety about 'being different' was reinforced by the school's discriminatory practices. Their worry can be understood in several ways. As described by Najib, the fact that these meetings took place on a few occasions created both more pressure and nervousness than if they had been part of the school's everyday life. However, their concerns can also be interpreted against the background of how these meetings were organized. The school arrangements were aimed at and based on learning about each other's cultures, with a starting point

in differences (cf. Lögdberg et al., 2023). For example, the girls were asked to visit the mainstream classes to talk about veil-wearing from their perspective. On another occasion, the mainstream students visited the newly arrived and spoke about a class trip to India. Furthermore, the classes got together to discuss and learn about cultural differences in an informal way. Although the newly arrived youths, through these occasions, became noticed and had a chance to describe their way of looking at things, such as veil-wearing, they were first and foremost noticed *as migrants*. Their ethnic and national backgrounds were emphasized, especially in relation to students who did not attend LI, and it was only in this way that the newly arrived students had the opportunity to matter. This can be compared with Carey's (2019, 2020) and colleagues (2022) research on marginal and partial mattering about communities of colour and youths being marginalized. That is, the young people are not given the opportunity to define and develop their self-concept in the context of the school based on their whole persona and academic potential but are instead examined and interpreted first and foremost based on, as in this case, having migrated and were thereby attributed a status as non-Swedish.

Taken together, the various examples inside and outside the classroom illustrate how the school's spatial organization and teaching were central to the students' potential to matter to others socially. These empirical examples further illustrate how the newly arrived students could matter internally within the classroom context, yet mattering was constrained externally to people outside the group of newcomers. As highlighted in the newly arrived youths' narratives, to matter to people outside the group of newcomers is essential for mattering in a broader, inclusive perspective.

On the Walls

In this last section, we look at the walls and the physical objects used in daily teaching, showing how materiality is vital when mattering is created. Through a tour of the school, the school's material character appears as divided areas; some places are marked out, while others can be interpreted as part of the hidden 'Swedish' background (cf. Ahmed 2006). Thus, the divided everyday life of the school was also visible and strengthened through the material design of the room and its characteristics and in the school's material resources used in daily teaching.

In the newcomers' classrooms, Swedishness was exposed as an orientation through posters on the walls representing the Swedish royal family and internationally known Swedish politicians, such as Anna Lindh and Margot Wallström, standing in front of a UN flag. Furthermore, there were posters of, for example, Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai, which can be interpreted as materializations of the equal values that the school wanted to communicate to the newcomers (cf. León Rosales, 2010). The teachers discussed these values as Swedish values and contrasted them with countries 'that did not stand for these', such as, according to the teachers, the countries from which the newly arrived youths came (cf. Lögdberg et al., 2023). As a path to integration, the orientation around and towards Swedishness (cf. Hagström, 2018) became apparent through the room's material decoration and resources. In the newly arrived youths' classrooms, messages were found in languages other than Swedish, which confirmed the newly arrived youths' position as migrants. Still, the young people were encouraged only to speak Swedish in the classroom.

In contrast, messages were communicated in Swedish in the common areas through posters and the monitor in the entrance hall. In the stairwell, one of the school's most central places, the 'regular classes' had made a countdown to graduation. This consisted of paper with a number for each day left until the end of school, a picture characteristic of the student's schooling and a clarifying text of the picture in Swedish. The pictures reflected these students' experiences of their time in upper secondary school. A picture was adorned with a Christmas tree titled 'Merry Christmas, all students'. Another image had the text 'The just started upper secondary school starter pack'. Below the text were pictures of designer clothes, bags, shoes and a takeaway coffee from a coffee chain. In many ways, the images did not reflect the newly arrived students. For example, not all celebrated Christmas and other traditions are illustrated in the pictures. However, the most apparent difference was that, even if they were the same age, most of the newly arrived students would not graduate at the same time as the non-migrant students, something that Nilsson Folke believes contributes to temporally parallel school lives and a feeling among the new arrivals to get stuck and not progress (cf. Nilsson Folke, 2017).

Thus, these common areas allowed some young people to pass unnoticed and pass as 'normal.' In contrast to the newcomers' classrooms, where Swedishness was exposed as an orienting line, the common areas were characterized by what can be described as Swedishness as a starting point or a hidden background (cf. Ahmed, 2006). Apart from the room's design, which enabled some relationships but excluded others, the school's material resources used in everyday teaching had implications for the young people's sense of being in line and how that matters. The following situation below shows a student's active lived experience of difference:

> During a history lesson, the students are given the task of translating words and writing down their meanings. They are directed to use the physical dictionaries to learn to look up the meaning of the words in Swedish in the reference books. The words they must understand include idea, growth, ideology, striving, influencing, improving, living conditions, oppression, rebellion, and revolution. The students pick up dictionaries on a small bookshelf on wheels that stand in the classroom. I sit down next to a student. 'I only have this dictionary to look at', the student says, turning to me and showing me a slightly worn pocket dictionary. He explains that it is the only dictionary available for his country. 'The whole country has one dictionary', he says, looks down, and goes on to say that he is alone here, the only one from his country in this town. The student searches for the teacher's words in the assignment, but not all exist. He does not find 'living conditions' and asks me what it means (Field notes).

Ahmed (2010, p. 53) describes how human doing is not about an 'inner ability.' It is about 'how the world is organized in a way that enables or blocks doing' (cited in Hagström, 2018, p. 49). The situation above can be made understandable with the help of Ahmed's description that certain bodies have their place and that things are within their reach. The situation illustrates one of the everyday practices where the school can be understood as directed at and designed based on certain bodies, the regular students. At the same time, the newly arrived youths were adapted to existing schemes and their resources. To summarize, this part showed how some students could be confirmed and create community by and through the school's materiality and thus pass as 'normal.' In contrast, for others, it could be a reminder that they

might not belong there and that the school was not designed for them, creating a feeling of loneliness and what can be explained as anti-mattering (Flett, 2018).

Discussion

Based on the experiences and orientations of newly arrived young people in the everyday school context, we have in this article suggested a new understanding of mattering that includes material and spatial conditions. We have shown how newly arrived youths' possibilities to matter for others could be understood in relation to how the school as an institutional context enables and constrains how the newly arrived youth orient and re-orient themselves in relation to how the room is organized and directed at certain bodies. The empirical examples demonstrate the importance of the social aspects, thus confirming a recurring social-psychological view of mattering. At the same time, the analysis indicates that the material and spatial conditions constrained their social mattering. The young people *arrive* at already-given arrangements within the Swedish school (cf. Lögdberg et al., 2023; Hagström, 2018). Thus, the school's spatial organization and material orientation around and towards Swedishness, as a specific form of whiteness and, thus, as a particular form of power position in a society oriented around Swedishness (Mattsson, 2005), conditions *how* the young people *can* matter to others.

The Swedish context is both unique and not unique when it comes to issues of everyday racism and how these can be understood in relation to mattering. Other researchers (e.g. Carey, 2019, 2020; Carey et al., 2022) have shown how young people of colour in the school context struggle to matter comprehensively. These challenges exist in the Swedish school context but have not been discussed and recognized in the same way as there has been a strong discourse around Sweden as a leader in equality and as a society that does not struggle with racism in the same way as in, for example, the United States (e.g. Hübinette & Lundström, 2022). This, we argue, creates a unique situation for young people who cannot 'pass' as 'Swedes' to negotiate their sense of mattering.

To build on Carey's (2019, 2020) reasoning on partial mattering, this study shows how partial mattering has a spatial dimension. We have illustrated how LI and the classroom context, with the closeness to and support from the teachers, contributed to the newly arrived youths' sense of mattering, while this feeling did not extend beyond the classroom boundaries. Thus, the young newcomers could matter in some places but not in others. Through the young people's narratives, spatial and relational boundaries emerge that complicate the relationship with other students at the school, making the feeling of mattering to others fragile. At the same time, the school's organization confirmed or strengthened their position as migrants, which may counteract further mattering. The newly arrived youths were allowed to matter *as migrants,* who, for example, must learn the Swedish language and understand cultural differences between Sweden and their former home countries. They were not given space to matter comprehensively (cf. Carey, 2019). Moreover, the analysis suggests that the school's material resources, used in everyday teaching, had implications for the young people's sense of being in line, which fenced their possibilities to matter to others.

Linking back to the articles' starting points about a sustainable school, which – besides removing physical and spatial barriers to enable newly arrived students to build relationships with (all) students at the school – have to allow newly arrived young people to have a social impact and equal opportunities to matter to others. Besides looking closer into how mattering is created through relationships, we argue that it is also essential to understand how the school's spatial dimension and materiality contribute to shaping mattering. Thus, to create an equal school, the school should critically examine the visual impressions created by coursework and what covers the walls to see which students are represented and not and in what ways this is done. The school should review available resources and how resources and premises are distributed. A guiding question might be: can all students reflect themselves in the spatiality and materiality of the school, and in what way does this reflection contribute to a positive self-image?

To our knowledge, these perspectives on mattering, including spatial and material dimensions, have not been studied before, and more research is needed to further explore this both empirically and theoretically. Understanding how the school's spatial and material design creates conditions for mattering can make visible unspoken norms—such as, in this case, Swedishness as a form of whiteness that is hidden in the walls—and thereby challenge and enable other and more equivalent designs of the school's social, spatial and material structures.

Acknowledgements

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

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