



Young People's Geographies

Evaluator's Report

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Contents

<i>Section</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Page</i>
1	Executive Summary	4
2	Context	8
3	Evaluation Question (I)	10
4	Evaluation Question (II)	13
5	Evaluation Question (III)	19
6	Evaluation Question (IV)	25
7	Conclusion	31
8	Acknowledgements	32
9	Appendices	33

1 Executive summary

Overview

This report considers the achievements of the Young People's Geographies project in its first year. It also considers issues and challenges that might inform development of the project in the future. The aims set by the project team were ambitious, but in many respects have been accomplished through a series of conversations and activities which underpinned curriculum-making processes. Overall the resulting curricula have been consistently oriented towards young people's experiences and interests (relevance), and in some cases curriculum making has been radically reshaped into a collaborative process, with new roles and responsibilities assigned (ownership). Three evaluation questions are based directly on original project aims, the fourth has been added to provide a space for exploring other emerging issues.

(I) How has the project to date explored the ways in which geography teachers use the lived experiences of young people to inform the process of curriculum construction in school geography?

Enabling teachers to think about geography from young people's perspectives:

- ❖ The project helped teachers start considering teaching about, from, and through students' perspectives rather than from the requirements of the curriculum
- ❖ The project also helped teachers access and understand the lived experiences of young people, laying the foundations for a pedagogy based on listening.

Variation in curriculum making processes:

- ❖ The project created a supportive context in which different approaches were adopted. These approaches tended to build on a common notion of relevance to young people's lives and interests, but were more divergent in the sense of student ownership and links to the formal curriculum
- ❖ The project changed some teachers' conceptions of what could be taught and learned in geography
- ❖ The project changed some teachers' conceptions of how young people can be involved in constructing their curriculum.

(II) How has the project to date explored different pedagogies through which young people can use their lived experiences to develop their geographical understanding?

Evidence of conceptual shift from students' perspectives:

- ❖ Overall it is clear that the different approaches mentioned previously, the interactions between teachers and students in schools, and the activities on meeting days have developed and scaffolded students' learning about links between themselves, places, and geography

- ❖ The project helped some students describe and use geography as a tool to think about different features of places, while for others it seemed to help them see and use geography as a way of thinking about themselves in relation to places.
- ❖ There is strong evidence to suggest that the project supported the development of students' geographical understanding – an understanding based on their experiences and links to other people and places.

The role of the teacher:

- ❖ In some cases the pedagogy might be characterised as successfully addressing issues of relevance, and beginning to address issues of ownership
- ❖ The project prompted some radical changes in pedagogy where content directly related to young people's experiences (relevance) was combined with process largely steered by young people (ownership)

Teacher understandings of links between young people's experiences and geographical understanding:

- ❖ Some pedagogies appeared to focus on helping young people engage with places in a 'more geographical' way
- ❖ Some pedagogies appeared to see relevance rather than ownership as key to motivation and therefore geographical understanding
- ❖ Some pedagogies combined relevance with shifts in ownership of content and process, while maintaining role for the teacher, based on subject expertise, which linked students' learning to deeper geographic concepts and other learning experiences
- ❖ The achievements of the project in developing such a diverse range of pedagogies should not be understated.

(III) How has the project to date helped to enable conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators that inform a dynamic process of curriculum construction ('curriculum making') in schools?

Conversations between students and teachers:

- ❖ The project created an environment in which meaningful conversations between students and teachers were used to develop mutual understandings and inform curriculum development.

Conversations between students:

- ❖ The project was strengthened through processes of inter- as well as intra-school conversations, but these were hampered in early stages by a lack of explicit support in transgressing school or age boundaries.

Conversations with academics:

- ❖ Teachers tended to value conversations with academic geographers in terms of getting new ideas and expanding their horizons as to what they could teach (or what students could learn) in school geography
- ❖ Students' impressions of the roles of conversations with academic geographers were mixed, and although they were generally deemed interesting and valuable, their links to the project were not always clear.

Other conversations:

- ❖ The project has, in its infancy, supported and prompted a range of conversations within and across schools and universities, and these have underpinned approaches which although varied, have successfully led to the making of geography curricula that are more relevant to and owned by young people.

The role of conversation in curriculum making:

- ❖ The links between these conversations and curriculum making have been, for the most part, clearly identifiable, and closely aligned with the underlying conceptions and aims of the project. However the role of conversations in curriculum making processes and the resulting nature (relevance, ownership) of the curriculum have varied.

(IV) What other issues have emerged which require further consideration and can inform future developments in the project?

Open-ended approach:

- ❖ The open-ended nature of the project itself, and particular activities within it, presented challenges for many students and also some teachers
- ❖ The project team should reflect on the future directions they envisage for the project, and in light of this, consider the relative merits of flexibility versus structured alignment with aims.

Age range and cohorts of students:

- ❖ A strength of the project thus far has undoubtedly been the involvement of students of various ages
- ❖ However age is a relatively weak dimension in the project conceptualisation and has raised some challenges regarding practice

Equity and opportunity to participate:

- ❖ The diversity of selected schools was valuable in exploring different approaches, and demonstrating the range of contexts in which this sort of venture could be successful.
- ❖ For the future the project team should consider whether a more transparent and democratic recruitment or joining process might work.

Realities of school life:

- ❖ Some participating teachers can feel their achievements on the project are hampered or constrained by external pressures.
- ❖ Others perceive a close integration between project work and formal curricula and assessment requirements.
- ❖ Some students experience anxiety about distraction from covering the examination syllabus.

Sustainability:

- ❖ Next steps should certainly take a long term view and pose questions as to how these kinds of experiences and processes might become a long-term feature of dynamic curricula in many school.

2 Context

Project aims

Young People's Geographies is a 2-year curriculum development project funded by the DfES Action Plan for Geography and the Academy for Sustainable Communities. Its stated aims are to:

1. Explore ways in which geography teachers can use the lived experiences of young people to inform the process of 'curriculum making' in school geography
2. Develop pedagogies through which young people can use their lived experience to develop their geographical understanding
3. Establish conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators that will inform a dynamic process of curriculum construction ('curriculum making') in schools.

These aims were set in the context of debates concerning the separation between school and academic geography, particularly the neglect of young people's geographies in the school context. The conception was to link school geography, academic geography, and students' lived geographies through conversations between relevant groups. This was based on a clearly articulated notion of how young people participate in their own lived geographies (Appendix 1).

The project seeks to utilise students' lived geographies to help them access a relevant and more owned experience in school geography. Relevance and ownership are important themes in this evaluation. Additional aims were identified in project documentation (Appendix 2); they are not considered directly in this report, although many issues discussed here touch on these questions.

Evaluator's remit

As evaluator I was asked to focus on three questions based on the original project aims:

- (I) How has the project to date explored the ways in which geography teachers use the lived experiences of young people to inform the process of 'curriculum making' in school geography?
- (II) How has the project to date explored different pedagogies through which young people can use their lived experiences to develop their geographical understanding?
- (III) How has the project to date helped to enable conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators that inform a dynamic process of curriculum construction ('curriculum making') in schools?

These questions relate to the *project to date* – the midpoint is approaching, and while this report highlights some key achievements and challenges, its purpose is not to summatively judge the project, but to offer formative guidance to strengthen activity in year 2. I have interpreted the phrasing *how has...* to denote interest in *in what ways...* and *how well...* - there are elements of both description and value judgement in this report. I have added a fourth question to ensure a forward-looking as well as reflective dimension:

- (IV) What other issues have emerged which require further consideration and can inform future developments in the project?

Evaluation process and evidence

As evaluator I attended two of four meetings in Leicester (involving students, teachers, teacher educators, academic geographers, project leaders). I also met with project leaders at two meetings of the GEReCo group, during which progress was discussed. During the year I accumulated evidence from a range of sources including: notes taken during meetings, emails from teachers and project leaders, recorded interviews with teachers and pupils in two schools, documentation forwarded to me regarding the project in general and specific meeting days, notes from telephone conversations with project leaders, email interviews with academics, and personal reflections. . I received DVD recordings of meetings where I was not able to be present.

I have found much evidence of highly innovative activity focused on the project aims (which were appropriately ambitious). However I have found it difficult to draw clear boundaries between the three evaluation questions I was asked to consider, and there is some inevitable messiness in the main body of the report. I return to these challenges in the conclusion.

3 Evaluation Question (I) How has the project to date explored the ways in which geography teachers use the lived experiences of young people to inform the process of curriculum construction in school geography?

The open-ended nature of the project lent itself successfully to exploring a range of teacher approaches to constructing a curriculum. There was considerable variation in the way teachers became aware of young people's geographies, and how this informed curriculum construction.

Enabling teachers to think about geography from young people's perspectives

An important role of the meeting days was expressed by a teacher who said "It's about opening our eyes and seeing the geography potential rather than the geography curriculum". Teachers tended to comment that hearing from academics helped them see beyond the confines of the National Curriculum, and to develop a curriculum around young people's experiences: "looking at what these young people's experience of what geography is, not geography the subject, but geography to think". On the final day one teacher reflected that the project had given her space to reflect, think and pause, away from everyday school distractions and routines, to consider big questions about geography with her students. *The project helped teachers start considering teaching about, from, and through students' perspectives rather than from the requirements of the curriculum.*

The structured activities at meetings created a context for perspective-sharing between teachers and students which underpinned subsequent work. As well as providing space for individual 'time out' from normal teaching routines, the project also created crucial collective spaces. This was achieved, for example, in an activity in which teachers accompanied their students walking around Leicester. This directly informed the approach adopted in three schools, in which students took photographs representing places which were important and meaningful to them. A curriculum based on global warming built on themes emerging from conversations between students and teachers in Leicester. In this case not only was the focus of work borne of students' interests, but the school-based activity aims to "discover what their peers really think about the issue". *The project also helped teachers access and understand the lived experiences of young people.* The value of this was emphasised by David Lambert on the final Leicester day when he commented how important *listening* was to the curriculum making process. *In fact listening may be seen as the foundation of a pedagogy of curriculum making based around conversations.*

Variation in curriculum making processes

The links between young people's experiences and curriculum construction varied from school to school. One group of schools kept the project activity separate from the classroom curriculum, using the experience this year to inform the development of a new scheme of work which will be piloted next year and hopefully incorporated into the formal key stage three curriculum. In some schools activity related to the project involved all students from one class, took place in timetabled geography lessons. A different approach involved students teaching each other in a specially designated week of activity in which students were in charge of researching and teaching an aspect of young people's geographies to other young people. *The project created a supportive context in which different approaches were adopted. These approaches tended to build on a common notion of*

relevance to young people's lives and interests, but were more divergent in the sense of student ownership and links to the formal curriculum.

Teachers tended to refer to two kinds of links between young people's experiences, the geography curriculum, and their involvement in the project. Some found the project helped them realise that local geography could be interesting to students, about "why all the grebbs and emos hang around the square on Saturday" – not just "unfashionable stuff like decline of local mining industry". *The project changed some teachers' conceptions of what could be taught and learned in geography.* Others changes combined student-led content with greater involvement of students in determining the process of learning. *The project changed some teachers' conceptions of how young people can be involved in constructing their curriculum* (this is discussed further below).

The flexibility incorporated in the project was a strength during this early phase. To have decided on a model or set of models would have reduced the freedom for students and teachers to be creative (something both groups especially valued), and may have proved unworkable in some contexts. However it must be noted that this open-ended approach gave rise to uncertainty and hesitation in some schools. Teachers and pupils alike tended to experience moments during the project where they were unsure if they were doing the right sort of thing (discussed in section 6).

At this early stage it is difficult to assess which models have been most successful, as it is perhaps still too early to define precisely what 'success' means. Below I offer an initial assessment of the apparent strengths and limitations of different approaches.

The approach adopted by the schools in Nottingham has in its initial phase constituted an add-on curriculum, open to only a select few students. It thus could not be described as particularly democratic or equitable, nor integrated into existing teaching and learning practices. It was seen by students and teachers as something extra which took time out of other aspects of school or working lives. However this strategy, when seen in the context of their longer term vision, appears to have the potential for embedding in school practices: if the scheme of work is successfully piloted, the practice of building on young people's experiences of places (including the use of photography) could become a formal part of the curriculum structure in each school, and thus eventually open to all students. If momentum can be maintained this would have the strength of working with young people's geographies as a routine part of geography rather than something special, and would have the potential for expansion across larger numbers of teachers and students.

The approach adopted in another school, where all students in one class were involved in the project (although not all were able to attend meetings in Leicester) was, in the short term at least, more directly integrating work in Leicester with the wider curriculum and a larger group of students. It remains to be seen whether more sustainable changes will be effected, such as incorporating such activities into a scheme of work. This said, the head teacher came to see students' presentations based on their project work; this was the first time the teacher had been visited in class by the head, and the head was so impressed she asked if an assembly could be devoted to showing this work to students across the school. This proved a great boost to students, the teacher, and the department. One advantage of this and other models (see below) relates to the raised profile

of geography within the school, and the visibility of innovation, student involvement and enthusiasm, learning outcomes, and external linkages (e.g. to the Geographical Association).

In a different school students were responsible for planning lessons and teaching other (younger) students on a topic they felt was related to young people's geographies. This involved dramatic shifts in ownership and pedagogic processes. However direct involvement in the project itself was limited to a small number of students, who volunteered a great deal of time out of geography lesson hours (over a period of time spanning public examinations). A strength of this approach is the extent to which young people became involved in many aspects of curriculum making – perhaps the deepest of all schools projects as young people actually designed and taught their own curriculum. However the demands placed on these students were high, and there may be potential problems with securing sustainability. Is the same curriculum repeated next year? Should new students design a new curriculum every year? How are the students selected?

Questions emerge relating to the value of such 'peak' moments compared to more incremental changes (such as a gradual shift from project to pilot to scheme of work).

Recommendations

1. Continuing to communicate and build on
 - a. strong messages regarding the need for geography to be relevant to young people's lives
 - b. effective mechanisms developed for helping students articulate and teachers understand the nature of young people's experiences
 - c. important work in helping teachers let go (of existing curricula, of control, ownership)
2. Reflecting on how the project should develop, and whether this might involve advocacy for particular approaches, and what the grounds for such advocacy might be; if a largely open-ended approach is maintained, considering ways to support creativity in context without jeopardising the integrity of the project (one possibility might be to collectively 'map' what is happening in different projects, so that teachers can situate their own work alongside that of other groups)
3. Developing and articulating a clearer sense of what success means, particularly in relation to achievements within and beyond formal participation in the project (this is discussed below).

4 Evaluation Question (II) How has the project to date explored different pedagogies through which young people can use their lived experiences to develop their geographical understanding?

This has been the hardest question to address. Documentation relating to the project demonstrates that the project leaders have a clear conception of how young people might draw on their lived experiences in developing their geographical understanding. This conception links closely with the Action Plan for Geography, and builds on notions of student-centred learning.

Evidence of conceptual shift from students' perspectives

One explicit attempt at such pedagogy involved the use of picture frames in a field activity in Leicester. Although students often found this a challenging task (discussed below), the conversations it stimulated suggested strongly that students were building on their responses to and perspectives on this place to consider (i) how they feel about their own places; (ii) how their views and representations of place compare and contrast with other views and representations; (iii) what it means to 'know about' a place; and (iv) what sorts of information and experiences might be valuable in learning about other places.

Significant themes documented in conversations and activities in which the notion of relevance emerges clearly (at the time, in interviews later, and on the final day in Leicester), including:

- ❖ The role of people in places: "I realise that it's not places that are rough so much as what people do in them" – *students reflected on the presence of young people in particular places at particular times, and the perceptions of this held by other people*
- ❖ The importance of feelings: "We've been thinking a lot more about how we feel in different places... fieldwork isn't normally about feelings" – *students commented how the work in Leicester and in school has changed their understanding of what a geographical approach to studying places involves*
- ❖ The value of testimonies about places from other young people: "young people are concerned to get an honest opinion about places", "not everyone sees places in the same way" – *students grappled with issues relating to whose perspectives about places are prioritised in their learning*
- ❖ Learning to see places in a different way: "we've learned to look at things differently... with the frame you notice a lot more stuff" – *students explained how the pedagogy of the frame helped them see new things*
- ❖ Changed conceptions of what geography is: "Before I wouldn't have expected to do this in a geography lesson but now I think geography can be just like where you live, the stuff around you... it's like your life and what you do. You realise that your own lives are related to geography" - *many students commented on the idea (new to them) that young people's experiences can be part of geography.*

I was able to have conversations with students (at meetings and in their schools) about how they think geography helps them understand places. Evidence paints a mixed picture, but it should be remembered articulating these links explicitly is not easy for students. I include this section because of its centrality to the conception of the project, although it is difficult here to associate particular understandings with specific pedagogical practices. *Overall it is clear that the different approaches mentioned previously, the interactions*

between teachers and students in schools, and the activities on meeting days have developed and scaffolded students' learning about links between themselves, places, and geography.

Some students commented that geography offered them a way of looking at places, and that what they learn in the classroom transfers easily to other contexts and places they encounter. When pressed for details they often referred to noticing buildings and parks (the environment), where things are (location), what things are near each other (spatial distribution), and seeing connections to their own and other places (patterns, variation). Other students tended, especially later in the project, to talk about how geography helps them understand their position in and relationship to both their own places and other places and people in them: "the project was all about young people's geography, like how what we do affects other people... [we have learned to] analyse ourselves, what we are doing, and take what we've learned and raise awareness about it". One academic commented on the "amazing... young people's confidence and ability to articulate their ideas", stressing that the progress evident over time was attributable in a large part to participation in the project. *The project helped some students describe and use geography as a tool to think about different features of places, while for others it seemed to help them see and use geography as a way of thinking about themselves in relation to places.*

One student (Year 12) felt that geography "got in the way of raw emotions" about a place. Although she believed that geography directed her attention to some things she might not otherwise notice, she found it "hard to let go of the geography behind it". This demonstrates how rigid young people's conceptions of geography can be – she thought the emotional side of places was important, but couldn't find what she considered a geographical language to describe it, and deemed it outside the boundaries of the subject. This should serve as a reminder that while as geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators, we may be confident in making concepts work for us and bending or stretching our conceptions, students may find this much harder.

Participating students clearly articulated a two types of outcomes – revised notions of what counts as geography, and a sense that their learning and understanding were enhanced also: "Most pupils thinks geography is about maps and stuff. But I know it's about how you live and how you affect other people and stuff. This has changed my view of geography. It helps me think about the deeper meanings, like why war started and stuff. Not just changed my ideas of geography, but made my learning better as well". Another student commented "It will help us with exams in the long run. Usually I just forget stuff within a week and I can't describe it later, but this stuff, I remember it well". Several of the diary room entries made by students on the final day provided clear evidence of learning through the project: "I've learned to look at things differently", "Now I see that geography is all around, it affects us all. Me, I am geography. It's about us as a community", "I've learned a lot, 'I'm good at geography, but I'm not perfect at it, and it lets me be better at geography". One academic offered the following comment through an email interview, which I would wholeheartedly endorse: "It was fantastic noting how from January through to July the pupils' confidence with discussing geography, conceptual ideas, and a subject specific vocabulary developed and blossomed". *There is strong evidence to suggest that the project supported the development of students' geographical understanding – an understanding based on their experiences and links to other people and places.*

The role of the teacher

An alternative way to approach this second evaluative question is to focus on the role of the teacher. Students from various schools described what their teacher did as giving guidance, helping them understand what others were saying, being an expert, helping them see deeper, alternative views, challenging stereotypes, and helping them develop or use their own knowledge and understanding to make sense of places. A reflective note from a project leader mirrors this: “students commented last week as to why they needed geography teachers – they needed them for their expertise to help them make sense of what they were seeing”. Some pedagogies scaffolded sense-making, drawing on subject expertise, in which the main pedagogical shift appears to be in relation to content – focussing on young people’s experiences – rather than process. This impression of the approach of some teachers was confirmed in the final day when, for example, teachers took sole responsibility for describing their project, using language such as “we asked the kids to...”. One academic questioned the role of adults in speaking for young people in this environment. This said, it must be acknowledged that these teachers were often responding to issues that students raised and thus the pedagogy was less teacher-directed than normal. *In these cases the pedagogy might be characterised as successfully addressing issues of relevance, and beginning to address issues of ownership.*

In other cases pedagogy seemed to have been radically changed, with students taking a firm lead in determining both what should be studied and how it should be studied, and teachers adopting a more back-seat approach. At one meeting students from one school were discussing previous ideas and developing new ones. The teacher tended to interject only to (i) explain to students that the grounds for their plans had been laid in the interim (e.g. setting up a MySpace site which students had said they wanted); (ii) reassure students that their ideas were do-able, and wouldn’t jeopardise their learning; (iii) ask students what they thought she as the teacher should be doing to help them. A different approach was adopted in one school, where (from both students’ and teachers’ perspectives) students gained almost total control of the curriculum making process right through to the point of students themselves teaching other young people.

In another school the teacher described his role as “less a teacher teaching... more of a facilitator... I’ve let go of rigid outcomes”. This was corroborated by the students when I asked them who was in charge: “We were. We told our teacher what we wanted to do and how it relates to geography. It was our idea and the teacher just oversaw and guided us. It’s the first time we’ve had this much control and have got to say what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it”. In this case the idea for content came from a poster students produced in Leicester, and the learning activities went through several cycles, including a movie idea that emerged in the Leicester meeting. The teacher did have an important role based on geographical expertise, however. One student remarked: “we had the actual idea, the teacher helped make it more educational”, another said “we couldn’t just say anything, it had to be related to geography; we needed someone to guide us and that’s what the teacher did and that made it better”. *The project prompted some radical changes in pedagogy where content directly related to young people’s experiences (relevance) was combined with process largely steered by young people (ownership).*

Teacher understandings of links between young people's experiences and geographical understanding

Despite these significant accomplishments, there are a number of issues relating to questions of pedagogy and links to students' geographical understanding that warrant further consideration. I sometimes struggled to ascertain (from direct questioning, participation in meetings, or other evidence) a clear sense from teachers as to how what was being done on the project served to develop young people's geographical understanding. Some approaches seemed rather shallow and not to tap into the deep conception underpinning the study (as expressed by the project leaders).

Some teachers expressed a link in terms of raising awareness among students of things they could look at and think about in their environment: "Does photography help children understand place better? Yes it is very easy for them to be wrapped up in their lives, they are teenagers... it's easy to walk around the place and focus on what you need to do rather than look at the environment around you". This seemed to build on a deficit model of young people's routine engagement with places, and see development in geographical understanding through the project as coming to notice more geographical features of a place. While this does not lack value it seemed more focused on bringing students to geography rather than geography to students. Links between activity and 'big' geographical concepts were present but less clearly linked in some cases than others. *Some pedagogies appeared to focus on helping young people engage with places in a 'more geographical' way.*

Another set of teacher understandings of links between the project, pedagogy, and students' geographical understanding focused specifically on issues to do with motivation and relevance. The argument ran that geographical learning is weakened when students are bored, disinterested, see content as irrelevant, and strengthened when the opposite is the case. The way some described the project gave the impression that benefits were largely centred on capturing students' interest, rather than grappling with concepts of space, place, and young children's geographies. One teacher explained "I do see a need for the curriculum to change, and I do think it's important to get student input on things, on what they feel is important or interesting... it needs to be something kids can see the point in because if they don't see the point they find it hard to make the connections and a lot of kids will give up". While it would be difficult to take issue with such a view directly, it runs the risk of assuming that changing curriculum to include relevant content will guarantee conceptual development. *Some pedagogies appeared to see relevance rather than ownership as key to motivation and therefore geographical understanding.*

In other cases the motivational power of allowing students ownership of content *and* process was combined with a clear sense from the teacher of conceptual power in the work students were undertaking. In one school, although the students felt they had pursued their own interests in a way they decided, the teacher was confident of links to 'normal' curriculum work and to more abstract geographic concepts. He saw both a role in providing a conceptual framing around the students' endeavours (linking their work on how their actions in one place impact on people in other places with the notion of interdependence), and in helping students draw on the learning in relation to their project later on in their geography course (using the various topics they had explored as case studies relevant to other parts of the curriculum). "It's not just motivation, but it helps them engage with the content... We have done different cases of things in the world and you come back at the end with debrief and plenaries and help people make links back to more straightforward geography. It gives them a vehicle to see

things a bit differently. A lot of kids struggle to understand how the different bits of the subject interrelate, but this can give them insight into how it is different bits of geography relate and link into each other.” I found two other examples of projects explicitly based around clearly articulated links to curriculum concepts (as articulated by teachers) – one based around futures, linking in to the pilot GCSE through exploring climate change implications, and another, also around futures, involving a possible scenario, its consequences and responses to it. In this case the teacher felt the conceptual learning and skills development (making evidenced argument about the future) would directly support students’ work in other areas of the curriculum (such as GCSE coursework). *Some pedagogies combined relevance with shifts in ownership of content and process, while maintaining role for the teacher, based on subject expertise, which linked students’ learning to deeper geographic concepts and other learning experiences.*

Variation in pedagogic approach is in general to be welcomed, particularly in these exploratory stages. *The achievements of the project in developing such a diverse range of pedagogies should not be understated.* However future activities on the project might benefit from increased or revised efforts to help teachers understand and share the starting points of the project leaders. My impression is that although there was a solid conception underlying the project design which was explicitly communicated to participating teachers, this came within an extremely full agenda (at meetings), and alongside considerable paperwork (in documentation prior to meetings), with the result that extremely busy teachers lost sight at times of the deeper purposes of the project and focused more on the more accessible issue of relevance, and ownership in terms of student input into content. The activities in meetings designed around linking to geographical concepts were sometimes squeezed out in hectic schedules, or were seen by participants as an interruption to the high energy discussions around young people’s experiences.

Recommendations

1. Continuing to build on effective use of meetings to introduce new ideas, modelling of potential pedagogies
2. Working with teachers on the conceptual issues underpinning the project in a context which is separate from the pressures and practicalities of their particular projects; this might help develop stronger and more clearly articulated conceptions focused on enhancing understanding rather than relevance and motivation and a more solid, shared platform for pedagogical development
3. A more sedate pace, and perhaps tamed ambitions, in each meeting. While there is some merit in providing a range of stimuli (e.g. possible questions to explore) for particular activities, in some cases the number of issues to be covered in a short time was impractical (e.g. the long list of questions used in an activity at the March meeting in Leicester, Appendix 3). This sometimes resulted in the more abstract links to curriculum and geographic concepts dropping off discussions
4. Producing a tool for teachers and students to use to reflect on the relevance and ownership dimensions of their work. These two dimensions were clearly set out in documentation and in the meetings, but sometimes became confused or lost in the work that followed. Such a tool might be something as

simple as asking participants to log at various stages in their project responses to questions such as: How does what we are doing relate to young people's lives? How does it relate to geography? How does it help us learn geography or make us better at geography? Who is making decisions in our project? Who is responsible for what?

5 Evaluation Question (III) How has the project to date helped to enable conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators that inform a dynamic process of curriculum construction ('curriculum making') in schools?

The project has enjoyed considerable success in facilitating a range of conversations, and these have, on the whole, been closely linked with innovative processes of curriculum making. Some challenges relating to the role of academics, and cross-school and cross-cohort conversations should be addressed as the project evolves.

Conversations between students and teachers

At the start of one of the Leicester meetings, a project leader mentioned efforts to “convince and explain to students that they [teachers] are interested in their ideas, getting students to ask questions and give their opinions about their geographies and the geography curriculum”. There was a clear sense among many of the teachers that conversations with students (including, crucially, *listening* to them) could feed directly into processes of curriculum making: “I want to know what young people want to look at in geography, and to feed this into key stage 3, to help decide what topics to deliver”... [later asking students] “What types of places should we study?”. Some conversations involved teachers not only asking students about their lived experiences and ideas for what they might want to learn about in geography, but also for their suggestions as to how teachers might more routinely come to understand young people’s geographies.

An important aspect of the project was the time devoted to conversations in the Leicester meetings – this provided a supportive environment for teacher-student dialogue (and also access to a range of other individuals). Significantly, these conversations were often continued in schools, and many students spoke of changed relationships with their teachers. Some conversations (particularly at the Leicester meetings) involved students questioning teachers. My impression from the discussions I sat in on, was that this was extremely helpful in levelling off conventional power/status/knowledge expectations, and creating a sense of mutual learning. Evidence consistently points to students involved in the project coming to see their teachers as genuinely interested in their perspectives and experiences, and to trust that this interest will actually inform learning processes. “I’ve realised that the teachers do care about what we think, they do want to know. It’s nice to have a say. We can change teaching so younger years benefit”.

Further evidence that the critical challenge of getting young people to trust that their voices will be heard and their contributions actually acted upon comes from the final day when students were asked to reflect on how the project might develop in the future. The DVD recording shows students confidently making creative suggestions building on a positioning of young people and young people’s geographies at the centre of the curriculum making process (suggestions included learning about knife culture, having students make podcasts for each other, creating a website). There is a clear sense that by the end of the project many students felt they could contribute to making a curriculum that would support good learning, in many cases with clear indications of shifts in content (relevance) and process (ownership). *The project created an environment in which meaningful conversations between students and teachers were used to develop mutual understandings and inform*

curriculum development. In this sense I would unreservedly endorse a comment made in email by a project leader: “The way the project has been conceived to give both students and teachers a voice would have something to offer a range of contexts. The energy and creativity that has been released by doing this has been simply amazing to witness”.

Conversations between students

Another important set of conversations took place principally between students from different schools and cohorts (although these were nearly always in the presence of adults). Towards the end of the project, students I spoke to tended to regard discussions with students from other schools as valuable in helping them see what other things were being done. The chance to meet other students was mentioned by many as a highlight of the project. However in early stages particularly these conversations were often much less fluid and comfortable than those in the more private within-school groupings. Notes I made during cross-school discussions at Leicester record my impressions at the time: “Often quite awkward, two students tended to dominate, others found it hard. Lower years input less. Adults helpful in keeping the conversation going”, “The older students used a lot of geographical concepts”, “In this interaction some students said absolutely nothing at all”, “The mixing groups exercise was hard for students, some were very nervous of leaving their school friends; add to this the layer of age, and it is very hard”. This sense was repeated in a student’s comment in interview: “They [older students] understood quite a bit more so they had more input. They have different views because they have been doing it before. They used strange words I didn’t know”. My sense of these difficulties was confirmed in the responses of one academic to questions sent by email: “I wasn’t sure the interactions between years 8/9 pupils and years 10/11 worked as well as they could – they are in very different places in terms of their school structure and also their engagement with geography”.

Another important thing to notice is that, especially for younger students, the sorts of abstract conversations around the nature of geography are quite challenging. “I thought talking about what you think about geography was hard because I haven’t really thought about it before. I could do it now, but it was hard at the time”. The potential for fertilisation of ideas and sharing of experiences across schools and cohorts is indeed great, but more could be done to ease the tensions that are experienced in these interactions. *The project was strengthened through processes of inter- as well as intra-school conversations, but these were hampered in early stages by a lack of explicit support in transgressing school or age boundaries.*

However, it should be noted that DVD recordings from the final Leicester day show a remarkable shift in the interactions between young people. These were evident in the confident presentations made by students in front of the whole group, the lively discussions held during the marketplace activity in which students appeared to act the roles of scouts and informants with ease, and in the diary room (where students from different schools and of different ages were interacting in a genuinely friendly and comfortable manner, giving the impression that they felt they knew and trusted each other). The chance to meet and interact with other young people was mentioned by many students in the diary room as a highlight of the project. David Lambert noted of the maps of experience constructed on the final day, how commonly issues of ‘confidence’ were denoted in students’ depictions of their journeys and achievements on the project. I believe this is testament to the hugely formative experience this has been for many students. This shift over time might be seen to support arguments that

although interactions with students from other schools and year groups can be difficult, this does not appear to be insurmountable, and the challenge itself may be regarded as an important part of the transformative potential the project offers young people.

Conversations with academics

Given the original framing of the project in relation to separation between academic and school geography, it is important to consider the role of academics in the conversations around curriculum making. Indeed original project documentation poses the issue of “how school and university geographers can come together and learn from each other”. As has been discussed previously, some teachers found the discussions with academics refreshing and energising, helping them think beyond school schemes of work, examination pressures, and school bureaucracy – seeing the “geography potential” not just the “curriculum”. One commented “I got some ideas, especially from the second day meeting with the University academics”, and another “I think it was good to hear what they were saying because they are the ones who do research, giving expression to the ideas in the grass roots. Helps you come up with topics and stuff for school”. However it seems the full potential of the role of academics in conversation with teachers has not been tapped in many instances. There is a sense that teachers did not enter these conversations with a well developed understanding of how academics were supposed to fit into the curriculum making process. *Teachers tended to value conversations with academic geographers in terms of getting new ideas and expanding their horizons as to what they could teach (or what students could learn) in school geography.*

Students’ perspectives on interactions with academics were mixed. Some, after the conversation with an academic about their research, commented, “This is exactly the sort of geography we want to do in schools, not land use or traffic counts”. This was important in helping students recognise a validity in studying geography about young people’s lives. Another commented, “I think it fitted to the project because it wasn’t your opinion it was *their* opinion. It was interesting to hear what she thought. You don’t really realise how many opportunities geography opens up”. I interpreted this in terms of the student conveying a sense that the project involved learning what different kinds of people (not just students) think about geography and how they study it. Others were less clear on the purpose of these conversations: “It seemed to be separate. I couldn’t see how it was related really. It was a bit random”. A teacher commented on feedback received from students about these conversations, painting a similar picture: “They found it a bit strange in so far as taking their shoes off, looking at their key-rings, they found it difficult to conceptualise really”. *Students’ impressions of the roles of conversations with academic geographers were mixed, and although they were generally deemed interesting and valuable, their links to the project were not always clear.*

The perspectives from academics themselves (evidenced in recordings of the final day and responses gathered by email) are similarly mixed. While they consistently valued participation and enjoyed learning about and watching young people engage with teachers in curriculum making processes, I gained little clear sense from them about how they fed into the curriculum making process: “Sometimes I felt a bit on the edge of things”. Another described having anticipated a more active role in curriculum making, but finding that participation ended up involving more listening and observing.

Other conversations

It is important to consider variation in other types of conversation within the project. The three Nottinghamshire schools were involved in regular conversations between teachers (with one commenting that this helped greatly in boosting confidence to do something 'risky'), and with project leaders, who visited the schools on a number of occasions and were involved in organising a student visit to the university campus. Students from these schools also met each other outside the Leicester meetings, and a joint exhibition event between the three schools has been organised for later in the summer. This can be contrasted with the experience of a London school, which was not visited by any project leaders (but was suggested as one of two site visits for the evaluator). Here conversations have been more restricted to those at the Leicester meetings, and emails between the teacher and one of the project leaders. While the successes in both contexts demonstrate that no schools 'lost out' due to this variation, it is worth considering the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches for future planning. In particular I would encourage the project leaders to think in terms of:

- ❖ sustainability – discussed further below, including ideas of embedding young people's geographies in the formal and 'normal' curriculum)
- ❖ resource intensiveness – in terms of required input from project leaders, time out for teachers, travel, materials, potential for sharing resources
- ❖ division of labour – shared load? isolated change agent?
- ❖ available support – conceptual, motivational, for confidence in risk-taking,
- ❖ equity – do some models tend to open up access to different types of schools in different areas more than others.

In addition I would draw attention to the thoughts of one academic (email included in Appendix 4). These raise issues of the close relationship between three Nottingham schools, which had clear value, but also seemed to distance those three from other schools involved.

The project has, in its infancy, supported and prompted a range of conversations within and across schools and universities, and these have underpinned approaches which although varied, have successfully led to the making of geography curricula that are more relevant to and owned by young people.

The role of conversations in curriculum making

In relation to the discussion above about the different degrees of ownership and student participation in curriculum making, there are many examples of conversations between students, teachers, and other adults, as being at the heart of a collaborative curriculum making process, that was not just about teachers getting ideas from students or others to make a curriculum more relevant. In these cases the process of curriculum making was indeed dynamic, and could be characterised as responsive to students ideas as well as their concerns, and casting students, teachers and others in new roles with new responsibilities (with teachers more supportive or facilitative than leading). The schools involved in a global warming week, reconfiguring A-level coursework, and making movies about students' lives and their links to other people and places would all be examples of this more approach where the role of conversations is so embedded in a radically different process of curriculum

making. In the words of one student: “The Leicester trip open our eyes to a whole new world. Of going from the textbooks to doing it by ourselves”.

However there is evidence that in some cases these conversations served more to inform teachers of how to rework their curriculum, rather than as a process that directly constituted joint curriculum making between teachers and students. One teacher found it difficult to answer questions about what the role of students was in making the curriculum, commenting: “I think it is still teacher led, but not in the sort of rigid conventional sense where teachers come up with all the ideas, do all the preparation and students just do what they’re told to do”. Asked whether it had changed perceptions of the way the geography curriculum can be made, this teacher replied “Yes I think it has in so far as it picks up what we are already doing, it does support this idea that the National Curriculum isn’t the be all and end all and doesn’t have to be set in stone. The project has been successful in that it’s given me ideas, the opportunity to sit back and think yeah that would be really interesting and maybe I do need to tackle this in a different way”. Curriculum in these cases has been made in a different way, different because teachers have felt freer (if not totally free) from the confines of the (National) Curriculum, they have listened to students and learned from them in order to develop a more student-relevant focus of study. This should in no case be considered an abject failure, but should rather be considered as progress aligned with the main aims, if not perhaps as far-reaching as other instances. (Interestingly, the teacher quoted above commented that more direct advice on how to take the conversations from Leicester into practical things in school would have been helpful.)

Students themselves were aware of variation in their input into the curriculum making process. This was particularly clear from their diary room entries. Students who had engaged in work around a possible future scenario clearly sought to articulate their ownership of the idea and inputs into the process, and those who became teachers of year 8 students for a week proudly proclaimed “the teachers weren’t really involved in our one”, noting that they got the impression in other schools teachers maintained a stronger role. However, another student commented that he had learned that geography “is actually something we can decide”. In a group presentation on the final day one student described planned fieldwork in the local area as “we designed it, and it’s our geography” – exemplifying how conversations did in many cases contribute to curriculum making in which relevance and ownership were strongly student-focused. One diary room question related to highs and lows of the project, and many of the reported highs related to actually being involved in curriculum making: “the feeling that you can change the geography curriculum, make it more fun”, “you feel part of something that can benefit others which is cool”, “you get to change geography, have an input, do what you want”.

The links between these conversations and curriculum making have been, for the most part, clearly identifiable, and closely aligned with the underlying conceptions and aims of the project. However the role of conversations in curriculum making processes and the resulting nature (relevance, ownership) of the curriculum have varied.

Recommendations

1. Continue working around the strong conception regarding conversation as a means to curriculum making; in particular it is important not to lose

- a. opportunities for students and teachers to ask questions of and listen to each other
 - b. opportunities for students to talk to students from other schools and of other ages
 - c. opportunities for students and teachers to talk to disciplinary academics and geography educators
 - d. flexible modes of operation that allow for varied additional conversations e.g. between schools, extended links between schools and universities
2. Reflecting further on how cross-school and cross-cohort interactions between students might be better facilitated to avoid nerves, feelings of isolation/separation from friends, dominance by vocal students, and lack of understanding; some possibilities include
- a. Having a designated 'listener' in some group conversations (role to note down key ideas, listen for unusual words), charged with reporting back to the whole group
 - b. Asking students to chair discussions
 - c. Bringing in techniques from research to facilitate interaction (eg. having participants write ideas anonymously on cards which are put in the centre and used to stimulate discussion)
 - d. Keeping students in pairs from their original school groups when engaged in cross-school conversations
3. Considering where conversations with academics are most valuable, and how students might be clearer in their understanding of how these conversations link to the project more generally
4. Thinking about the varied conversations that have taken place outside the Leicester meetings, (along the lines listed in bullets above)
5. Articulating more clearly (on the basis of this year's explorations) what the envisaged role of conversations is in the curriculum making; this need not be deterministic, but teachers and students would benefit from a territory being laid out for them (e.g. conversations to inform teacher-led curriculum design, conversations as collaborative curriculum making, all or none of these?).

6 Evaluation Question (IV) What other issues have emerged which require further consideration and can inform future developments in the project?

Many of the issues discussed below have been touched upon in previous sections of this report. The purpose here is to highlight issues that are relevant to, but not directly addressing, the three evaluation questions in my remit. These are signposts, and the expectation is that project leaders will consider them as they take the project forward.

Open-ended approach

Conversations with teachers and students expanded upon an issue that emerged through observation of and participation in many aspects of the project: *the open-ended nature of the project itself, and particular activities within it, presented challenges for many students and also some teachers.*

Several teachers commented after the photo-frame task that students were used to more closely defined activities and found it quite hard. A student commented: "I thought the instructions were a bit vague, go out and take pictures of what you find interesting. You're not really sure what people want from you. More guidelines as to what they are looking for would be good. It doesn't have to restrict us, but ideas". Teachers noticed more generally that students found many aspects of the project quite challenging and unnerving: "I felt in Leicester at some points people felt at sea, didn't really know what they were doing. But we had to come up with something from the ideas and take it forward and that was it really", "We brought four of our brighter students to Leicester, and they did say at times it was a bit vague and we had to really think hard about what we were doing. I think lower ability or lower confidence students would find it very hard. The open-endedness of it, the lack of structure. The lack of being told what was going on... it's part of their personal identity to think that they know what is going on. They may sit and nod and say yes it has been like this when really they don't know". It might be argued that this is a healthy experience for students, and indeed perhaps one the project can offer that is typically harder to figure into school-based routines.

The challenge of open-endedness was also experienced by some teachers at a more project-wide level: "It needs tightening up, up it needs to have a clearer sense of direction... The weakest and the strongest part is that this is not really a rigid structure. At times you think what am I supposed to do, but this allows you to do what you want. I think having a dialogue with the kids, getting their opinion with what topic we should do helps". This issue was identified by the project leadership team at the outset: "One of the key challenges for us in coordinating this project is to enable flexibility whilst at the same time being secure of some valid and significant overarching project goals and aims".

Such an open-ended approach in the first year of the project was entirely appropriate, and has not jeopardised significant achievements closely aligned with project aims. The initial aims and evaluation questions refer to 'exploring' different issues, and in this context allowing a number of models to emerge was fitting. The project team may decide to continue in this way. Schools, teachers, and students vary greatly; such an approach is able to respect this variation, and avoids the potential stifling of creativity that may accompany a more tightly framed project. If this is the case then the project team should consider carefully how teachers and students

might be reassured and their uncertainty reduced – both with regards to the project as a whole, and with respect to particular activities within it. Alternatively, there are arguments favouring a stronger setting of direction by the project team. A tighter framing might be necessary to push school-based activities towards addressing both relevance and ownership issues, or might simply prompt teachers into more breaking out or risk-taking – when things are left open, many teachers might opt to play it safe (especially given ‘real life’ curriculum pressures discussed below).

The project team should reflect on the future directions they envisage for the project, and in light of this, consider the relative merits of flexibility versus structured alignment with aims.

Age range and cohorts of students

A strength of the project thus far has undoubtedly been the involvement of students of various ages. Above all this demonstrates that joint curriculum making is not a process reserved for one year group, but can work effectively with students across secondary school. However age is a relatively weak dimension in the project conceptualisation and has raised some challenges regarding practice. It would have been difficult for the project team to weave a clear notion of age variation into the initial plan, given the pioneering nature of the project. However as it matures age should form the focus of questions asked by project leaders, those continuing to participate, and those joining for the first time. These questions might be broad and conceptual, but should be discussed with a view to thinking about the support offered to teachers and students and whether this might be tweaked according to the age of students involved. It seems possible that curriculum making processes might look different with sixth form students who experience different lived geographies, have different relationships with their teachers, have worked with different geographical concepts and content, and who have different concerns regarding examinations, than (for instance) students from year nine. What are the barriers (conceptual, practical, emotional) which might hamper students’ engagement in curriculum making conversations and processes at different ages? What opportunities do particular moments in a school career offer? What would it be like if school groups were comprised of students from different cohorts? One email from an academic (Appendix 4) offers some valuable thoughts and suggestions on this issue.

Equity and opportunity to participate

Recruitment of teachers worked through invitation to join by the project team. The justification for this was entirely appropriate – in this initial stage it was important to bring in people who would be ready and willing to take risks in a new venture. Even with this selection procedure the sample of schools involved was remarkably diverse, in terms of geographical location, socio-economic background of catchment, history of links with the Geographical Association, and so on. *The diversity of selected schools was valuable in exploring different approaches, and demonstrating the range of contexts in which this sort of venture could be successful.*

For the future the project team should consider whether a more transparent and democratic recruitment or joining process might work. Given the extremely positive outcomes associated with many dimensions of the project, it would be a shame if any school wishing to participate was denied the opportunity, although finite resources and availability of support will limit this. It may be that the project is most valuable and could have

most impact in schools *not* like those recruited this year – where risk-taking and creative curriculum work is not part of the existing culture, where geography is not a leading or popular department in the school.

It would equally be a shame if schools involved this year wished to continue and develop or extend their young people's geography curricula, but were not able to do so. Decisions will have to be made about the balance between opportunity to continue participating and opening up fresh opportunities to new schools. One possibility would be to offer currently participating schools (either teachers, students or both) the chance to continue if they are willing to act as mentors to new groups joining in the second year. This would seem to be one way in which the achievements, as well as anxieties of the first year could be shared productively. Students might visit each other in different schools, learn about other places and how other young people experience and feel about them, and develop relationships that would make cross-school interactions on meeting days more productive.

Issues of equity also relate to students within participating schools. In some cases all students from one class were involved, although not all had the opportunity to go to Leicester. This had the advantage of reaching out to a larger number of students, but was limited to one class which had this special project. In other cases students were selected from within a class or from several classes (diary room responses to the question 'why did you get involved' most commonly referred to being asked or selected by a teacher). This can have the strength of securing the involvement of committed, confident and enthusiastic students, but often depends on a non-transparent process of selection by teacher. It might also miss the very students for whom this sort of experience might be most transformative. Project leaders should consider, in dialogue with teachers and possibly students who participated this year, whether a flexible approach (i.e. let teachers decide) should be maintained, alternatives explored (students decide?), or a firmer expectation regarding student selection decided centrally by the project team.

Reality of school life

This issue refers to the strong pressures, anxieties and constraints experienced by some teachers and students about 'normal' school practices, and the extent to which participation in this project is both a relief from, but also influenced (sometimes negatively) by these realities.

One teacher was particularly frank about the tensions she experienced during the project, wanting to be supportive of her students in making a new curriculum, but feeling a strong pressure to perform in non-project defined ways (particularly public examinations). She explained, "As far as letting go is concerned the days I was at Leicester I stopped thinking about the current curriculum. But it was hard because I kept thinking where does this fit in? Try to fit it into a pigeon hole somewhere e.g. this is development, that is population... it gives us a bit of creativity, but then I get reigned in because I also teach full timetable. There is a desire to be a good teacher, to be creative and give our kids the best stuff, and there is the timetable, how many hours you teach, your paperwork. And there is the pressure of the curriculum as well. It's a three-way balance". *Some participating teachers can feel their achievements on the project are hampered or constrained by external pressures.*

The same teacher gave an example of how these pressures worked against her ambitions for the project: "You go to the meeting, you feel inspired and this is exciting. And then you go back to school the next day and you've

been out of your classroom and there's a million things to do and you lose momentum sometimes". For this teacher the collaborative planning time she spent with other teachers from the Nottingham schools was crucial in actually creating a space for translating what happened in Leicester into a school reality (however this was a more teacher-centred approach based on curriculum making by teachers informed by conversation with students).

Not all teachers felt that outside pressures were competing so intensely with project work. One commented: "If you're willing to spend the time and do something about it, it can be integrated into the curriculum quite easily. For example you could embed the movie making stuff we've been doing into an internet lesson. Time on this hasn't distracted from the core curriculum". In another case the teacher was confident that activity on the project would strengthen rather than compete with existing curricula, and would enhance rather than distract from students' learning towards an examination syllabus. However here, the students (year 12s) were quite concerned that if they were involved in making the curriculum, that they might jeopardise their examination grades. I observed numerous interactions on different days in Leicester in which students from this group asked the teacher if what they were planning was relevant to the syllabus, if they did it would they have time to cover the syllabus, or if they focused on a certain thing would they still be able to get high marks. Here the role of the teacher was to reassure students that nothing would be allowed to happen in which such negative consequences were foreseeable. Students from another school explained (in the diary room) how they had had to stop working on the project for a while to concentrate on examinations. It is important to realise that curriculum-related pressures and anxiety are not automatically experienced, nor are they just felt by teachers. *Other teachers perceive a close integration between project work and formal curriculum and assessment requirements. Some students experience anxiety about distraction from covering the examination syllabus.*

A point made by several people on the final day related to the importance of finding ways to embed project work into a scheme of work or curriculum, particularly as a means to relieve some of these tensions and pressures. This relates closely to the issue of sustainability.

Sustainability

This issue arises primarily because of the achievements of the first year, such that despite the need for revision and clarification in some areas, *next steps should take a long term view and pose questions as to how these kinds of experiences and processes might become a long-term feature of dynamic curricula in many schools.* The project team should now concentrate considerable effort in thinking through sustainability issues, confident that they are seeking to embed and extend something which has been proven successful in many regards.

Sustainability might mean many things, and what follows is offered as a way into thinking about these issues, not a set of firm recommendations.

Sustainability can be considered with respect to particular school contexts. How do the conversations between teachers, students and others this year live beyond the initial project activity? Do particular topics and ways of working become part of the routine scheme of work – an enduring feature of the structured, formal curriculum in schools, as is planned in the three Nottinghamshire schools? Would it be appropriate in some cases to initiate

new conversations with new students as cohorts move through the system – not assuming that the geographies and interests of one group apply to another? Could one keep doing this indefinitely? Within schools, what does expansion mean? Involving more students? Using these processes to make ‘more’ of the curriculum? Working with different age groups? Are young people’s geographies something that could and should become embedded in school schemes of work and assessment methods? Or do they retain the highest energy, creation and innovation when seen as something different?

Sustainability can also be considered in terms of the efficient cumulation and sharing of expertise and experience between different people involved in the project. The idea of schools from this year mentoring those entering in year two relates to this. One possibility that has already been discussed among the leadership team is that of project leaders working closely with a small number of schools each year, facilitating some of the cross-institution conversations that have happened only in some cases this year. This might offer professional sustainability for the academics and geography educators involved if it can be aligned more closely with a research dimension in academic work, with a view to collecting data and writing for publication. Stories, experiences and resources might be posted by participating schools on a website, with teachers and students being committed to logging and sharing their experiences as a condition of participation. Although documentation in itself does not guarantee long-term and far-reaching communication channels, these cannot function without a solid record of what has taken place and how people feel about it, and mechanisms for ensuring such records exist for future reference should be an important feature of future activity on the project. The idea (offered by an academic on the final day) of quilting in relation to drawing together the diverse experiences and achievements of different schools is interesting and worth considering further.

Financial sustainability is, of course, a crucial issue. Cover for participating teachers was financed through the project budget this year, and there was a strong sense that many schools would not be able or willing to meet such costs themselves. I am aware that a number of avenues for securing additional funds have been and are being explored. I can only add that on the basis of the huge value and potential that is evident from what I have seen, these should be pursued with vigour, and I would encourage the project team to think about modest growth in scale over a five-year period. An instant expansion might distract from details which require further attention and refinement, but I believe there is a strong imperative to broaden the reach of the project.

An equally important dimension relating to finance concerns identifying elements of the project and modes of working that might perpetuate with little or no monetary costs. What conversations can be had on location in schools, or via the web, for free? What aspects of curriculum making and young people’s geographies can be interwoven with or embedded in existing resources (such as the Geographical Association website)?

Finally, the lasting impact of the project and the ideas behind it will require continued theoretical work. The project started from a robust conception which allowed for the creation of possibilities and exploration of issues. The longevity of curriculum making around young people’s geographies will depend on developing a theorisation of young people’s experiences (drawing from academic geography), and of the ways young people can be involved in curriculum making. One way to weave in a stronger research strand (mentioned above) might be to pose theoretical questions or aims alongside (revised) practical ones. These might explore notions of relevance and ownership further (Relevant to whom in what ways? In what ways do young people feel like

they 'own' a curriculum that was made by other young people?). It would have been difficult, and indeed a distraction, to attempt this kind of work in the first year. Now, as different models emerge, the theoretical imperative is strong.

7 Conclusion

It is important not to lose sight of the significant accomplishments that have been secured during the first year of the project. Students overwhelmingly discussed their experiences positively, and many felt that participation had changed their view of geography (for the better) and helped their learning. Teachers overwhelmingly found the project provided a much-needed nudge to think and act beyond the confines of existing curricula. Many new forms of conversation were held between students and other students, teachers, and academic geographers. Students learned to think differently about places, their role in them, and how their experiences relate to geography. Teachers learned more about young people's geographies and about how these can be incorporated into the curriculum. In some cases curriculum making was radically transformed into a process of collaboration and discussion between teachers and students. The project has prompted and supported a range of new curricula which reshape how geography can be relevant to and owned by young people.

A number of issues require clarification and further reflection as the project moves forward. Given the highly ambitious goals set by the project team, and its pioneering nature it is inevitable that some aspects of the project work better than others at this exploratory stage. These should not be rued as past weaknesses, but identified and considered in future planning. An important part of this will be to discuss whether the original aims might be supplemented with others which focus more specifically on the second year, and which articulate a leadership decision on some of the issues that have arisen in this report. This should be theoretically grounded, and oriented towards theoretical development as well as practical activity. This would help steer the project through its next phase, and provide a more specific framework for future evaluations.

8 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the students, teachers and academics involved for their honesty, openness, and above all friendliness in my meetings with them. I would especially like to thank the staff and students at the two schools I visited, where my insights into the project were greatly enhanced by the opportunity to talk in depth with project participants. I am also grateful to the academics who have taken time to respond to my questions, making a valuable contribution to this evaluation effort. The leadership team have helped me learn about the project, share in its achievements, and have given me an engaging and challenging remit as evaluator.

9 Appendices

Appendix 1 Extract from project documentation detailing underlying conception

Young people participate in their own lived geographies. On a day to day basis they are part of different social groups, they interact simultaneously with others at both a local level (friends, family) and at a global level (via the internet), they navigate very complex networks of participation from informal social groups (friends, school groups, shared social activities) to more organised social activities (such as clubs, sport and music) and formalised group activities especially in school. In addition, their access to spaces and places are enabled and/or hindered by a range of factors and influences such as parents, financial considerations, age group, feelings of safety, identification with different groups, personal interests.

Appendix 2 Additional questions listed in project documentation

This project will begin to consider how to utilise students' lives geographies to give them access to a relevant and more 'owned' experience in school geography. We want to consider:

1. What do we mean by young people's geographies within the context of secondary schools?
2. How can such geographies form part of the school geography curriculum?
3. What might the pedagogies be that support students' understanding of their own geographies?
4. In what ways might such an understanding shape and influence students' understanding of other geography discourses?
5. How can teachers access such discourses to inform their geography teaching in secondary schools?

Appendix 3 Activity sheet from meeting in Leicester (15th March 2007)

Young People's Geographies project: Your story... So far...

What have you been doing?

What places have you been thinking about... in what ways... why?

What are these places like?

Who makes decisions about these places?

How do you feel about these places?

Do you feel included or excluded in these places?

Do you have any say in the decisions that are made about these places?

Should you?

Could you?

Why have you been doing what have you been doing?

Is it important to understand about places?

How are places made?

Are places simply the points where things happen?

Are they part of the background to your lives?

Or

Are places important?

Does how you feel about a place, what you know about a place, change the way you choose to spend your time?

Does geography matter?

Can school geography help you to understand places better?

If it can – how could this be done – what support and information do you need to find out more?

How could you contribute to your geography?

Is it important to you that school geography makes space for your geography?

Is it important to you that you have your say in what you explore in your school geography?

How might geography help you in your everyday lives?

Appendix 4 Example email interview with academic (edited for anonymity)

1. What in your view have the main achievements of the YPG project been?

Not in any order of importance: bringing together academics, pupils of geography, teachers, teacher trainers and the GA in one space over a period of time to develop conversations about geography and young people's geographies in particular; to allow connections between schools to develop – although there were some possible problems with this that I query below; providing space for insights into the ways curriculum development can take place; learning from each other – there was some really great and powerful learning going on through this project; putting young people in contact with university academics – hopefully some of them may feel more confident about thinking about the possibility of attending university or going into FE at some level.

2. What have been the main challenges, where is there scope for improvement?

These aren't challenges as such, but I think they might need thinking about. On the whole I think the whole initiative was extremely well structured, organised and put into practice. However, here are my suggestions for future thought.

The selection of schools and age groups of participants – it might be useful to reflect on whether it works better for pupils of the same age/ year group to be involved. I think this might enhance the conversations and exchanges in a more productive way for teachers and pupils – I wasn't sure the interactions between years 8/9 pupils and years 10/11 worked as well as they could – they are in very different places in terms of their school structure and also their engagement with geography. Maybe parallel workshops could be organised that link same year groups together?

One great thing that happened was the linkage of the three Nottingham schools – however, this group then became quite large and almost self contained – they didn't connect so well with the other schools. So perhaps a different forum to provide the space for 'near schools' to establish those collective practices might be one initiative and a forum where different schools from different places connect and share together.

I think there needs to be a more structured forum to act as an ice-breaker for pupils and teachers – separate from each other. I think the pupils would have valued talking to each other much more than they did – the hoped for mixing in the first sessions that involved the pupils didn't really happen as well as it could have done – so despite the common experiences, tasks and participation it remained very separate even up to the last meeting. They were, in some cases, just getting started in talking to each other – it would have been great if this could have been structured in a bit sooner. Ice-breaker sessions such as those run on youth schemes, adventure activities etc would work well I think. Once connections between pupils and pupils, teachers and teacher (mixing the academics in too here) are made then there is more confidence to ask questions, share examples and experiences etc.

Videeing and recording was at times rather intrusively done – I noticed times when the mike was suddenly plonked on discussion tables the conversation stopping or some young people becoming silent. Perhaps as part of the introductory sessions this could be integrated a bit more, students might take responsibility for collecting a mike and putting it on so that they feel an ownership of the process of recording rather than being objects of it. More time to play back some of the filming and recording done would be valuable – we would all see the point of being filmed and recorded then.

3. What have you got out of participating?

The chance to have an input and gain an insight into a different working through of geography – and it is very exciting. I enjoyed having to think about ways to make my work and ideas based in academic geography accessible for different audiences – I'm not sure whether I did this effectively – but I found it valuable to work at it.

I really enjoyed meeting the teachers and the young people – but I would have welcomed a more fun ice-breaker session at the outset of the joint sessions – sometimes I felt a bit on the edge of things – which is fine – but I wasn't sure whether this was me appearing to be unapproachable or shyness on my part and on that of the other participants.

I got some interesting ideas for possible tutorial and seminar activities to use at university level – the blank maps exercise is something I am going to use in my teaching at university! So the exchanges were two way.

4. How do you see your role in the process of curriculum making with young people?

Until this particular activity I would have said my only connection with curriculum making in schools/ with young people would be through delivering a particular form of geography at degree level which some of my students who become geography teachers (and there are several of them each year) may then integrate into their teaching. I know that materials [I develop have] been utilised in many classrooms. For the future though I'm not sure to what extent I can play a role outside of what I outlined above.

5. What impressions do you have of how others you have interacted with see your role in the project?

This I am really not sure about. I know the GA and Nottingham Univ folk were very positive about me being there – I was always made to feel very welcome and a part of the exercise by them. I think the teachers I talked with over lunch and so forth found it easy to have me there. I'm not sure what was felt about my contribution though – I was never sure whether I pitched it right.

Perhaps the best part was the sharing of my research with a small group of pupils from the different schools... I didn't really elicit many questions and so I was worried that what I talked about was either blindingly obvious or that I didn't leave any room for questions.

In the last session I wonder whether we (academics) were a bit superfluous? But I think the pupils did enjoy showing us their work – but I wondered why the teachers (in almost all cases) presented the work the pupils had done – I wonder whether a more collaborative presentation would have worked better and have given the pupils a different (if a little nerve-racking) experience. I'm also a little unsure about adults speaking for/ on behalf of children/ young people in an environment where the younger folk should be given the space to speak for themselves.

At a general level I was very flattered to have been invited to participate and I really enjoyed the four days. It was just fantastic noting how from January through to July the pupils' confidence with discussing geography, conceptual ideas and a subject specific vocabulary developed and blossomed. There was some really excellent geography taking place and evidence of a great deal of hard work by pupils and teachers. The support of the GA is clearly invaluable and should be maintained. I still talk about some of the projects and displays the young people produced to my colleagues in education and academic geography. The final day in July was just wonderful because the quality of work and the enthusiasm of the pupils was excellent and very inspiring. I feel very privileged to have been allowed to share in this.