



Young People's Geographies

Evaluator's Report: Year 2

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Executive Summary

This is the second of two evaluation reports commissioned within phase one of the Young People's Geographies project. The evaluator was asked to focus on three questions.

(I) How effective have the dissemination routes chosen by the project team been in sharing the ethos of the YPG project?

Overall the project team have developed an impressively broad and effective dissemination strategy. This has included a range of thoughtful and media, and has reached a variety of audiences including teacher educators, teachers, and geography academics, both nationally and internationally. The diversity of dissemination format reflects careful choices as to the appropriateness of particular means of communication to particular contexts. Analysis of the content of dissemination material suggests that the story and ethos of YPG have been communicated persuasively.

There remains room for improvement and enhancement, particularly as the project moves into phase two. It will be important to expand dissemination routes which engage directly with school teachers. Project leaders would be justified in spending time and resources in pursuing the challenging goal of reaching the harder to reach teachers. A further challenge in developing the dissemination strategy relates to embedding YPG into existing communication channels among teachers and in considering the extent to which dissemination should reflect the shape and ethos of the project as *conceived* versus the shape and ethos of the project as *experienced and valued* by teachers and students.

(II) Does the YPG website reflect the project appropriately?

The website was not finalised at the time of writing. This delay reflects a very careful, collaborative and consultative process of website development, and project leaders are right to be patient, waiting to launch the website at a later date. Taking the time to make sure the website has the right look and feel was clearly well spent, as initial reactions have overwhelmingly been positive in this regard. The website achieves a colourful format which appeals to young people while maintaining appropriate gravitas.

It is clear from the current status of the website that many of the suggestions made in an interim evaluation document have been taken on board. Given this, and the high standard of the material already present, the evaluator is extremely confident that the final website will both reflect the YPG project appropriately and appeal to a wide student and teacher audience that will ultimately stimulate further YPG activity. A number of specific suggestions are included in the detailed section of this report.

(III) How successful has the project been in year two in sustaining conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers and geography teacher educators?

The project has been hugely successful in sustaining the positive outcomes and energy from year one. Activity in many schools can continue, often becoming more firmly embedded in curriculum structures, and involving a

greater number of teachers and young people. There were fewer project meetings, attended by fewer teachers and no students. As a result the nature of conversations has shifted somewhat, becoming more embedded in everyday school activities and less situated in one-off away days.

The role of academics in YPG activity was raised as an issue in the evaluation report at the end of year one, and remains unresolved, as the successes of year two were largely separate from input of academic geographers. The most important conversations seemed to be those between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers, as teachers and teacher educators. The project team made a clear effort to respond to an issue raised in the first evaluation report regarding the need to consider the future of the project in terms of a more rigid structure, or a looser approach. Ultimately the project team appear to have made a good decision in focusing on what is central to YPG approach without defining specifically how this is implemented in a school context.

Context

Background

This is the second of two evaluation reports commissioned within phase one of the Young People's Geographies project. This first two-year phase has been funded by the DfES Action Plan for Geography and the Academy for Sustainable Communities. In year one the focus was on working with a small number of schools to initiate curriculum making through conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers, and geography teacher educators. After these first 12 months an evaluation report was produced. Key conclusions from this included:

1. The project had been successful in helping geography teachers use the live experiences of young people to inform the process of curricula making, by helping teachers access to understand young people's lives, and supporting them in developing, with young people, learning experiences focused around young people's geographies. Many of the resulting curricula have a clear sense of student ownership.
2. Conversations proved to be crucial in the process of such joint and creative curriculum making. This was clearest in relation to conversations between teachers and students, and students and students. The role and value of conversations with academics was more varied and less clear.
3. The open ended nature of the project enabled schools, teachers and students to pursue a variety of ideas, with the result that in the final meeting, a diverse range of school-based activity was evident. The first evaluation report posed questions relating to the trade-off between providing a tighter structure, which might align more closely with project aims, and maintaining a flexible approach which might better accommodate variations in school contexts.
4. The first year was undoubtedly overall hugely successful, and thus the final concern of the initial evaluation report related to sustainability, both from year one to year two and beyond.

This report reflects on the achievements in year two. In light of the fact that further funding has been secured to support a second phase of the project, it also looks forward to consider issues relating to the long-term future of the project.

Evaluation remit

The evaluator was asked to focus on three questions:

1. How effective have the dissemination routes chosen by the project team been in sharing the ethos of the YPG project?
2. Does the YPG website reflect the project appropriately?
3. How successful has the project been in year two in sustaining conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers and geography teacher educators?

For various reasons website development has taken longer than anticipated. Accordingly the evaluator was asked to produce an interim evaluation report (see Appendix) which provided initial reflections on the evaluation questions based on the evidence that had been collected by mid July 2008. The emphasis was on formative feedback to support ongoing website development. The website remains under construction at the time of this final evaluation report, but there is sufficient structure and content in place to provide the basis for a reasonable response.

Evaluation process and evidence

The evaluator attended two project meetings and visited one of the participating schools. On this visit two teachers and a group of students were interviewed. Additionally the evaluator interviewed a teacher in a non-participating school, both to consider prospects for phase two, and to get feedback on the website. In place of further visits (which proved difficult to arrange), an email was sent to all participating teachers asking questions similar to those that would have been asked in interview. Two responses were received. Project leaders also provided the evaluator with audio recordings of interviews with teachers and students in two further schools, alongside materials relating to project dissemination.

(I) How effective have the dissemination routes chosen by the project team been in sharing the ethos of the YPG project?

Overall the project team have developed an impressively broad and effective dissemination strategy.

Within-project communication

Communication between project leaders and participating schools is crucial. The final meeting at the end of the first year constituted a lively and much-valued means for students and teachers to share their work with others. This was complemented by the time-consuming but nonetheless worthwhile editing or video resources which were then distributed to participating schools. One teacher commented explicitly on how useful and stimulating it was to receive these video materials, adding that one in particular have been seen and used at a number of CPD events throughout the year. There were fewer meetings in year two compared to year one and these were not attended by all the participating teachers. It is clear that the project team made every effort to ensure that those who could not attend were kept up to date, either by email, through telephone conversations, or visits to schools.

Wider dissemination

Wider dissemination beyond those involved in the project has included a range of thoughtful and media (the website remains under development and is considered in greater detail in the next section):

1. A presentation at the Geography Teacher Educators' conference
2. A lecture, workshop, and teacher-to-teacher interaction at the annual Geographical Association conference
3. A symposium of linked presentations at the conference of the Association of American Geographers
4. A chapter in the book *Living Geography* edited by David Mitchell
5. A chapter in a planned forthcoming publication as part of a GEReCo volume edited by Graham Butt
6. A presentation at the RGS/IBG conference.

This list demonstrates how dissemination routes have reached a variety of audiences including teacher educators, teachers, and geography academics, both nationally and internationally. The diversity of dissemination format reflects careful choices as to the appropriateness of particular means of communication to particular contexts, and strengthens the overall dissemination strategy. Analysis of the content of dissemination material suggests that the story and ethos of YPG have been communicated persuasively. In many cases the project is situated in relation to wider education policy frameworks, relevant academic literature and theorisation, and the real-life pressures and challenges teachers face in their everyday work. Dissemination materials are characteristically peppered with images, examples, and quotes from participating students and teachers. This helps bring the ethos of the project directly into the foreground, and indicates the extent to which project leaders have been meticulous in documenting project activity and integrating evidence and documentation into all presentations and written material. Where appropriate dissemination has also been critically reflective, often pointing to the first evaluation report and also considering some of the challenges for

the future. Such a careful and critical approach is further reflected in the audio recordings of interviews conducted by the project team with participating students and teachers.

Challenges in dissemination

Despite this hard work and significant achievements to date as regards determination, there remains room for improvement and enhancement, particularly as the project moves into phase two. It will be important to expand dissemination routes which engage directly with school teachers. The Geographical Association conference is an appropriate venue, but tends to reach teachers who already draw on many of the Associations' resources and materials. Given the transformative potential of the project (as documented in the previous evaluation report) it seems that project leaders would be justified in spending time and resources in pursuing the challenging goal of reaching the harder to reach teachers.

A further challenge in developing the dissemination strategy relates to embedding YPG into existing communication channels among teachers. This would have several benefits, helping to ensure sustainability, and moving towards a more devolved model that did not depend solely on dissemination driven by the project team in one-off events such as conferences. Several teachers suggested that INSET might provide opportunities for dissemination, and the potential to exploit cascading models (for example targeting heads of department who might then take ideas forward with other staff) should be explored. The project team should also consider whether the YPG ethos and indeed its legacy might be encapsulated in a glossy leaflet, or teachers' wall planner (both suggestions made by teachers in interview with the evaluator).

The evaluator recognises the pressures facing teacher educators as academics to prioritise publication in journals and other academic outlets. The strong academic grounding of the project and dissemination activity to date suggest that reaching academic audiences and articulating the success of the YPG project in more academic terms will not pose a significant challenge. The difficulty will be in ensuring that the teacher audiences, characteristically harder to reach and harder to write for, remain in the foreground of dissemination activity.

The interim evaluation report suggested that identifying a single YPG ethos might be problematic. The receipt of additional evaluative data and further analysis has confirmed this to an extent. It does seem that the ethos of the project as expressed by those in schools mirrors quite closely, albeit conveyed through a very different language, the ethos described by the project team (e.g. in documents detailing the YPG approach). Teachers and students did on the whole share the project leaders' notions of learning focused on young people's lives, using geography to help young people better understand their lives and experiences, and engaging in processes of curriculum making in which responsibility and ownership is transferred at least to some degree to young people. In this respect a greater similarity between project leaders, teachers and students has become apparent than was evident at the interim stage.

The differences picked out in the interim report seem at this stage to relate to variation in how the core ethos of YPG relates to significant change. For students YPG appears to be experienced as something new, exciting, fun, interesting, and often empowering. Teachers describe their involvement as professionally exciting and

engaging, and see it as a means to challenge and develop their practice, often focusing on developing curricula and learning experiences which capture the interests of students by exploring something that is directly relevant to them. The project as expressed by the team leaders is not divergent from the ethos described by students and teachers, but it is situated differently. For example the use of framework in defining principles which characterise a YPG approach indicates how the YPG ethos can also be linked back to wider ideas about agency, democracy and the nature of knowledge production.

This issue is raised here because it relates directly to the question of whether dissemination appropriately reflects the ethos of the YPG project. Discussions with teachers and students suggest they are most receptive to short, simple forms of communication that relate directly to their context and priorities. It might therefore be worth considering the extent to which a form of the YPG ethos can be communicated without recourse to the more complex academic groundings. This is not to suggest that communication with teachers or students should be dumbed down, but perhaps to reflect the fact that a common ethos – which can clearly be articulated and has clearly been shared by many participants – may resonate differently in different contexts. The project ethos seems to combine a set of principles or key approach with a sense of how it feels to be involved in YPG activity. It is in this sense of how the project feels that a dissemination strategy too rigidly attached to a single ethos might actually impede effective and persuasive communication.

This raises the following question, first expressed in the interim evaluation: to what extent should dissemination reflect the shape and ethos of the project as *conceived* versus the shape and ethos of the project as *experienced and valued* by teachers and students. That there is a subtle difference between the two is not a failure in the project, but rather indicates that YPG can be meaningful to people in different ways, and have a different feel while sharing the important ideas and values which define YPG and its unique contribution to curriculum development and geography education.

(II) Does the YPG website reflect the project appropriately?

Given that the YPG website is still under development it is appropriate to provide evaluative comment on the process of the website construction and on its current shape, offering both formative as well as summative remarks.

The process of website development

The process adopted by the project team in constructing the website has been collaborative and open, constantly seeking a feedback from various stakeholders. Although this has taken longer than anticipated the approach is laudable, and any delays reflect the detailed and careful work that has been done in putting the website together. The interim evaluation report suggested that in the long term it would be better to delay completion of the website and continue in this less speedy fashion than to rush something through purely in order to complete on time.

Aspects that struck the evaluator as exemplifying the nature of the approach taken include:

1. Allocating significant proportions of the two meeting days to discussions of the website – initially with respect to planning, and later with respect to provide informative feedback on an early version of the site
2. Writing to the teachers involved to explain the process of website development, and asking for examples of student or teacher voice that might be included on the website
3. Incorporating in the second evaluation a remit to discuss the website with teachers who have not been involved in YPG so far.

As a result, although the website has been delayed slightly, it reflects the diversity of views and ideas of people who have been involved in YPG.

Current structure and content of the website

Taking the time to make sure the website has the right look and feel was clearly well spent, as initial reactions have overwhelmingly been positive in this regard. The website manages to achieve a colourful format which appeals to young people while maintaining appropriate gravitas.

It is clear from the current status of the website that many of the suggestions made in the interim evaluation document have been taken on board. Given this, and the high standard of the material already present, the evaluator is extremely confident that the final website will both reflect the YPG project appropriately and appeal to a wide student and teacher audience that will ultimately stimulate further YPG activity.

Several aspects of the website already stand out as particularly good examples of effective dissemination practice:

1. The homepage is immediately enticing, with obvious hooks in the form of a question to viewers, and a featured page. It is not cluttered, and the navigation bar effectively directs people to different areas of the website. The homepage embodies parsimonious writing which is characteristic of a good proportion of the website
2. The use of the menu at the side of the screen and the layering of increasingly in-depth information alongside video in the 'About YPG' section demonstrate effective use of web-based, hyperlinked formats
3. The intention to include blogs and forums in the 'My YPG' section is interesting, and recognises the need for an interactive element to the website. However this will be the hardest to populate and will require close monitoring
4. The 'Resources and Ideas' and 'Get Involved' sections provide easily accessible information of precisely the sort that teachers and students said they would be looking for.

At this stage some areas of the website seem more user-ready than others. Currently the 'Approach' section is the most wordy, and this might benefit from a very punchy articulation of how a YPG approach is distinct – not nine complex concepts, but perhaps three or four key ideas (such as focusing on young people's lives, giving students choice about what and how they learn, using geography to understand issues relevant to young people). The 'Conversation' area also seems, in its present state, less direct and accessible than other aspects. For formative purposes a list is provided below of the key points emerging from feedback provided by students and teachers. It is recommended that as the website is finalised these points are revisited and used as a tool for critical reflection:

1. The website should be simple. This does not mean that the ideas within it need to be simple, but navigation must be clear, pages uncluttered, and text reduced to very small chunks with the only exception being downloadable documents where the user has made an explicit decision to seek further in-depth information
2. As much of the website as possible should be freely available without the need to register
3. Students say they are more likely to visit the website as part of schoolwork, for example they could envisage being directed to it by their teacher to help them choose and define their own YPG curriculum; students may well revisit the website at home and contribute to blogs out of school, but some kind of in-school use by students seems most likely
4. It seems that the ideas and ethos of YPG have a strong appeal to many teachers, and for these users their interest will very quickly become in finding examples of YPG activity; these examples should explicitly represent a range of levels of commitment, for example varying from a single lesson to a full scheme of work
5. Teachers also felt strongly that to engage, or to persuade others to engage they would have to be able to access quickly and easily an area of the website which explained and demonstrated what the benefits of adopting a YPG approach are
6. In general it might be useful to assume that users may not scroll down the page, and therefore a key point or sentence must appear at the top of the page that both make sense in its own right and may entice users to read more. In this sense the writing is rather like that of newspaper articles, and

particularly on the main pages in each section, they should be constructed so that people reading only the first paragraph will be able to understand at least what the key message is.

The success of the website irrespective of content depends on making sure the right people are directed to it or find it. It will therefore be crucial to ensure clear links to the website are present in other websites that geography teachers use and trust. Visits to the site should be monitored on an ongoing basis, and if possible weekly or monthly breakdowns of total hits, unique visitors, and the sites that people linked from should be recorded.

Overall the distance travelled in terms of website development to date is impressive given that this has clearly not come at the expense of sustaining YPG initiatives in participating schools (as is discussed in the next section). The quality of the website as it stands owes much to the collaborative and patient process of its development and it is strongly recommended that this continue: better to wait and launch a website that is full of examples and already-developing blogs than one that houses empty pages. In some senses the website should feel like it has been there for a while from the moment it is launched.

(III) How successful has the project being in your two in sustaining conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers and geography teacher educators?

It is clear that the project has been hugely successful in sustaining the positive outcomes and energy from year one.

Activity in year two

In the majority of schools the achievements of year one have been sustained and in many cases built upon in year two. The exception is one school which, despite repeated attempts at making contact by project leaders, has not engaged this year (even here, given the success enjoyed in year one, it would not be at all surprising if similar activity has not been repeated this year).

The fact that many teachers have worked hard to embed YPG activities more formally into their curriculum and schemes of work is testament to the value they perceived in the outcomes from the first year, and the long-term prospects of the project.

In several schools based in the Nottingham area, a project that was in year one limited to a small number of students and conducted on an extra-curricular basis has now become a formalised part of the curriculum enjoyed by all students in a particular year group. Participation has widened not only for students, but also for teachers. Teachers in more than one of these schools are already discussing ways to incorporate YPG type activities across the curriculum, engaging with different year groups and different topics.

In another school similar work was maintained with the same pupils who had been involved in year one, and the teachers commented that they appreciated taking the time in year two to retain enthusiasm with the current cohort of students, to reflect on what had been achieved, and to think carefully about what might come next.

YPG activity was sustained differently in yet another school. Here the project created by one group of students was repeated with the following cohort, but expanded to include links to local archive and library work. On reflection one of the teachers involved in this school felt that in future she would ask each year group to define their own project rather than importing the same project from year to year. Although she believed the second year had been successful (and there was indeed evidence of continued valuable activity, and students coming to understand more about their own geographies and taking more responsibility in the learning process), there was also a sense that the students felt less ownership. The reflections of this teacher and others indicate not only that YPG activity has proved sustainable, but also that teachers in schools have a capacity to critically reflect on developments from year to year with respect to the quality of student learning, and key aspects of the YPG approach such as relevance and ownership.

The nature of conversations in year two

Having established that YPG activity has continued and in many cases grown or become more firmly embedded in wider school practices, we can now consider the nature of the conversations that have underpinned the

successes that have been enjoyed in year two. There were fewer project meetings, attended by fewer teachers and no students. As a result the nature of conversations has shifted somewhat, becoming more embedded in everyday school activities and less situated in one-off away days.

Several teachers commented that they did not find the lack of project days (such as those which took place in Leicester during year one) impeded their work in any way. In fact the converse seems true for at least some teachers, who felt that visits from university staff to schools meant the conversations took place in a more realistic environment, and that more students and teachers could be involved. However not all schools received such visits on a regular basis, and this did result in the role of geography academics being limited to participation in two meetings which were not widely attended by teachers or students involved. One teacher commented that any project which takes staff and / or students out of school is disruptive, and therefore any means to embed activity within schools is likely to make it easier to accommodate, and more appealing to a wider range of teachers.

The role of academics in YPG activity was raised as an issue in the evaluation report at the end of year one. Although an important part of the project as initially conceived, and valued to an extent by students and teachers, the academic input does not seem to be foregrounded at all by teachers or students. Furthermore the progress that has been made in year two seems to suggest that the involvement of geography academics is not a vital part of sustaining YPG activity. While it would be a shame to rule out such conversations altogether in the future, it may be worth considering a slightly more streamlined approach in which academic involvement happens as and when it is convenient or sought out rather than as an integral aspect of conversation which underpins curriculum making. Teachers seemed to draw inspiration more from students and their lives than from their understandings of developments in academic geography, and academic or university geography is largely absent from the student discourse in this second year.

The most important conversations seemed to be those between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers, as teachers and teacher educators. Several teachers who participated this year suggested that conversations across schools are important, and were very much valued in the first year. For some schools the lack of designated project days did not hamper cross-school conversation as these were facilitated by pre-existing links between institutions. However other schools appear to have become more isolated and the conversations have become more restricted to a within-school context. Nonetheless as was noted above, considerable success in sustaining YPG activity is still evident in these cases.

The project team made a clear effort to respond to an issue raised in the first evaluation report regarding the need to consider the future of the project in terms of a more rigid structure, or a looser approach. Ultimately the project team appear to have made a good decision in focusing on what is central to YPG approach without defining specifically how this is implemented in a school context. In this way the ethos and key ideas and values of the project are carried forward, and thus the direction of movement remains aligned with the initial project aims, but at the same time the initiative remains flexible enough to be accommodated in a range of contexts. This seems particularly promising given the prospects for continuation in phase two.

Part of the project team's response involved the presentation of a framework drawing on the work of Bereiter and Scardamalia in the first project meeting, and its subsequent refinement and transformation into a YPG approach based on nine concepts. The attempt was to expand upon what was envisaged by the project team as characteristic of YPG activity and to communicate this to participating teachers. A set of core principles could then be shared, maintaining links to a common YPG approach, but beyond this teachers and students would be free to pursue activity in a variety of different ways.

As discussed previously, it is evident that the activity in year two has maintained a healthy diversity and relevance to context, while simultaneously remaining faithful to much of what is important to a distinct about YPG approach. However none of the teachers interviewed drew specifically on either the original framework or the nine concepts of the YPG approach in their discussions of what YPG meant to them or how they implemented it this year. This is not to say that aspects of the YPG approach cannot be traced in year two activity, but that year two activity appears to have been driven by a more general sense of the YPG ethos developed in year one and the more specific and complicated approach that emerged through year two.

The following quotes illustrate how much of the activity from this year remains aligned with the initial aims of the project and of its general ethos. They also demonstrate how elements of the more recently developed YPG approach may be evident, albeit more incidentally than as part of a deliberate strategy to incorporate all nine principles in the work in schools.

Comments from teachers

We were trying to be in tune with pupils, what they want, what the kids enjoy doing, how they actually see different things that are going to affect them... How do we take something they are interested in and make it geography? That's the expertise of the teacher isn't it? To be able to see the bigger picture know what the geography is and build a scheme of work around that.

It's about getting the kids to be able to give their perceptions on things, getting them involved, doing something that is interesting to them. Doing things in a different way as well, not just preaching at them... it's trying to know your kids as well.

I think I would have to do something totally different for every year group them to fully engage with it rather than trying to fit a model of another year group... it was top-down first of all now it is beginning to be bottom-up, they are still interested... and they feel ownership.

I just enjoy the opportunity of learning what they wanted to do in their geographies because it is about them at the end of the day.

We found the project professionally exciting and engaging... YPG means the involvement of young people in curriculum design, and guiding them towards the realisation that geography can inform their understandings of their world and their own development as global citizens...

I would like to think that my own children will be more involved in curriculum making than I was at their age: that education isn't something you have done to you.

We wanted to understand young people and their geographies, and try and engage students to interact with their everyday geographies... it means that we can develop our teaching and learning so that it incorporates relevant geography and hopefully engages students in their work and enhances their understanding of geography, alongside our understanding of their geographies.

Comments from young people

Learning about stuff that is actually important, like close to you.

It was definitely better because it was our own lives.

Why was what you were doing in this project geography? Because geography is about your way of life, what things you live in, and the way you're treated, your friends, how you get stuff, hard living... we could go into town and look at the things that are different and the buildings that are there and everything, the environment, the emos in the corner.

It's the fact that you are doing it yourself. You take more in if you actually do it.

The more interested you are, the more attention you will pay and the better you will learn.

I still look a school in a different way now. I think about it, when I walk down the path down there, I still notice all the chewing gum there.

We learned about what was on our doorstep, not what was in a textbook. We saw new things in the places where we live.

It's different because it doesn't really feel like geography, but it is geography, just not the traditional one. This is different because it's like revolving around is.

We were doing it ourselves, we chose what we wanted. It makes it actually our project.

It's good to do stuff that affects us, you can relate to it more.

It was our project so they had to listen.

It was interesting because normally in geography you sit in the classroom doing nothing but to get out with the camera was good. We had the freedom to be able to do our own project, and you could do it with your friends.

It was good because we got to have a say about what kinds of things happen.

We learned that we actually have quite a bit of power because if we took a picture of this and it was taken to the head teacher and he thinks 'oh yeah they're right here that looks a bit messy' then he might just change it.

It makes us feel better that we know the teacher trusts us. The teacher can trust us, you can get more independence.

If you're just sat in the classroom with the teachers saying do this, do that, you don't feel that mature or responsible but if you do something like this you feel that the teacher can rely on you.

Conclusion: looking to the future

As is typical of the work conducted by the project team, discussions about how to take things forward in phase 2 have been collaborative, and have sought the opinions of people involved. The considerable achievements of years one and two clearly merit continuation of this project. The two end of year evaluation reports demonstrate that the project is well conceived, its aims are achievable, the outcomes valuable, and the initiative sustainable in schools. Further funding has been secured for several more years, although this is not as substantial as the initial funding, and will gradually reduce over the second phase. The following paragraphs offer some final reflections on how the project might be taken forward.

Early discussions about the prospects of phase 2 suggested aiming for modest expansion on a regional basis, perhaps using advanced skills teachers or other teachers previously involved in the project as mentors and liaisons between schools. This seems like an extremely solid basis upon which to develop the project in its next stages.

The more centralised model of year one, and to a certain extent year two, involving planning meetings and project days is costly, and can be disruptive to school calendars. The experience of year two shows how difficult it is to find times when even relatively small numbers of teachers are able to get together. The embryo of a more devolved model described above seems well positioned to overcome these challenges by replacing frequent central meetings with a hub-and-spoke network of relationships between teachers, project leaders, and of course young people.

It is important however to reflect on the value of the project days, and to be aware that no new schools joined in year two. There is currently therefore no indication as to how easy it might be to work with new schools without the space set aside for discussing project aims, sharing ideas, building confidence and initiating conversations.

As has been mentioned previously a model more based on visits either by project leaders, teachers or students in schools potentially has many benefits. They may be less disruptive, create opportunities for more students and teachers to participate, foster relationships between schools, and encourage the crucial conversations that have underpinned the achievements so far. Furthermore they have the potential to be more closely embedded in everyday school activities, and perhaps as a result experienced more as part of curriculum work rather than a novel addition to it.

The role of academic geographers in the YPG project remains uncertain and should be considered carefully. Academics clearly have a lot to offer teachers and students, but finding a cost-effective means to incorporate their perspective will be challenging. Furthermore project leaders must look carefully at the perceptions of teachers and students regarding what academics contributed to the project and where their contribution might be most valuable.

Project leaders were highly ambitious in their initial expression of aims and to a large extent these aims have been achieved. The considerable effort required to transform such creative but often daunting goals into such concrete and valuable outcomes is notable. As the second phase begins to take shape it might be worth reflecting

on how, given inevitable financial constraints and the prospect of long-term sustainability, the project might be streamlined as it is expanded. It might be considered a sign of strength in the project for the leaders to take stock of the many laudable aims and valuable outcomes and to decide which of those are most important to sustaining and spreading the ethos of YPG. It would be a shame to the energy and momentum that has been created so far to dissipate as funds are reduced and spread more thinly.

Appendix

Young People's Geographies: Interim Evaluation Report (Year 2)

This short summary outlines key issues emerging from ongoing evaluation work. While almost all evidence has now been collected, there remains a considerable amount of analytic and evaluative work to be done before a full report will be submitted in September 2008. This document was requested as a formative response to help project leaders begin planning for future years. Two teachers involved in the project have been interviewed in person, and a further two have provided responses via email. A group of students has been interviewed, and notes taken at project meetings over the year. A non-involved teacher was also interviewed both about the project in general and with specific reference to the website. Additional materials were provided by project leaders.

How effective have the dissemination routes chosen by the project team been in sharing the ethos of the YPG project?

Dissemination thus far has undoubtedly attended to a range of interested audiences, including teacher educators, international academic communities, and teachers. Conference presentations and book chapters are appropriate means to share what has been achieved, although they tend to reach academic audiences and already engaged teachers (eg. GA attendees). A wider teacher audience should be a priority in developing dissemination strategies. Analysis of the content of presentations and written material suggests it effectively communicates the initial rationale, evolution and achievements of the project.

There is evidence that aspects of the project have begun to trickle through non-centralised dissemination channels (such as INSET). This raises the question of how existing external channels might (better) be used to do some of the 'work' of dissemination, and to ensure long term sustainability. At the present the priority should be on establishing project-led dissemination, but prospects for more distributed or devolved channels should not be ignored, and would benefit from being highlighted as a key focus at an appropriate time in the next phase of work.

The website will be a crucial dissemination route – and probably the most important one in the short and long term. The next section considers website content in more detail. At this stage the site remains under development and for good reason has not been made widely available. However it remains unclear as to what the strategy will be for ensuring that (i) the 'right' people know the website exists and what they might gain from visiting it; (ii) that these people will (hopefully) visit the site more than once, and engage with its interactive (web 2.0) aspects.

A significant issue that is emerging (and to an extent was pointed to in the first evaluation report), is that two notions of YPG ethos appear to have been developed, one among the project leaders, academics and some teachers, the other shared by most teachers and students involved. There is in many instances a difference in the 'feel' of the project as described by project leaders versus the ways teachers describe their experiences and reasons why they value YPG. In brief, the 'academic' ethos is more strongly grounded in a fundamental shift in

notions of knowing, power relations, agency, and links between academic and school geography. The 'school' ethos is more grounded in pragmatism of working life, notions of relevance, and engaging learners. These are not totally distinct, and indeed share many of the core YPG ideas expressed in various materials (for example the 3 ideas bulleted on p7 of the 'Living Geographies' piece). It is *not* the case that teachers have not understood or engaged in some of the deep shifts in thinking about curriculum making through conversation with young people. However, the ethos appears to resonate differently with different people. This was apparent in the way few teachers seemed to have embraced (or were able to recall or articulate) notions from the framework presented in November 2007; the nine principles which are at the heart of the website, while being recognised as worthy and relevant to the project, tended not appear in the ways teachers described what YPG meant to them.

This is not necessarily a bad thing – it suggests that the project has a sound philosophical and pedagogical grounding (which has been effectively communicated in many contexts), and that this can be translated into something that busy teachers find valuable, practical, and relevant. I have not seen evidence that the more school-focused ethos means that important principles are not adopted: rather it seems they are internalised and expressed differently, and re-shaped in a school environment with the result that a qualitatively different, but complementary ethos emerges.

It is important for project leaders to reflect and decide whether this analysis has any resonance with the way they have experienced working with teachers and students, and, importantly, to consider the extent to which they think reproduction of a recognisable 'academic' ethos (i.e. one very close in language, conception and feel to the one that drives them in their work) is a signifier of success.

If the emergence of varied notions of YPG ethos is recognised and perhaps even valued, then it will be crucial to ensure that dissemination focused on teachers and students respects this variation. This is not to say that the academic ethos should be absent, but to recognise that an ethos that mirrors that which emerged in teacher and student accounts might offer a more appropriate 'way in' to YPG, means to grab the attention of other audiences, and importantly, vehicle most likely to encourage wider involvement and implementation.

This can be seen as raising the following question: to what extent should dissemination materials reflect the shape and ethos of the project as *conceived*, versus the shape and ethos of the project as *experienced and valued* by teachers and students. That there is a difference between the two is not a failure to achieve goals, but a sign that the project has taken on a form and been described in a language that befits the school contexts in which it is 'lived'.

Does the YPG website reflect the project appropriately?

The question asked of the evaluator above assumed a (near) complete website at the time of evaluation. Currently the website has an emerging structure and is populated with examples of likely content. The project leaders should continue to prioritise 'getting it right' over 'rushing it out', and delays in going live the website can be seen in part as a reflection of the seriousness with which website development has been taken. A website that launches with the 'right' structure, feel and content in early 2009 will be much more valuable than a less-

considered, emptier site launched before the next academic year. The requests from project leaders asking teachers to submit work, be interviewed or narrate stories should be pursued, particularly in these early stages (see point 7 below on the importance of the website feeling full right from the start). While videos, sound clips, and written quotes are very important, examples of schemes of work, students' work, and activity or task sheets are what teachers seem to be immediately looking for and expecting to find easily on the sites they visit.

In light of its current status, the following paragraphs digest some of the feedback and suggestions that have been received, in the hope that they will be useful in a formative sense.

1. The general look of the website is well received. The simple, colourful format appeals to teachers and students, but it does not lack an appropriate gravitas either.
2. The repeated message from teachers and students is that good webpages have minimal text (200 words is a lot!), that the text is clearly broken up into short chunks, that there are visual accompaniments (whether photographs or logos); the approach of users seems to be to first skim over short bits of information (spread over several pages, levels, or clicks), and to choose where to dig in for more detail; currently some of the pages function better than others in achieving the 'quick glance' top level.
3. Registering puts people off. Students and teachers both commented that they often don't bother to register – for reasons of time, hassle, and the feeling that they will get bombarded with junk emails, don't know what they are getting into, envisage cost implications. In the words of one teacher the interface has to be very simple – this includes adding and sharing information as well as more passive reading of the website.
4. The main tab buttons are crucial. Currently they risk not making much sense to users, and have perhaps been more shaped by the project and how it has been developed rather than what a website visitor expects. For example 'projects' was unclear to some teachers – whereas a button called 'examples' would help people find what they are often seeking out very soon on reading a website. Similarly 'create a project' sounded formal and at the same time was unclear, while 'get involved' was suggested as a more flexible, open, and welcoming button.
5. Feedback from teachers suggested that the hook for grabbing attention is really a quickly accessible example of something practical, something they can see within a school context; things like schemes of work, and example task sheets were particularly noticed and remarked upon as things which resonated with teacher users. Background and further contextual information were important for helping teachers explore further or gain a sense of what they might be part of, but were not the starting points in teachers' thinking or information-seeking. The use of PDFs seemed particularly effective – they are optional dig-ins rather than content clutter, and teacher users liked things they could download and print off. Arising from this is an apparent need to make sure that key ideas are not only embedded in web pages but also where necessary replicated in PDFs as these are more likely to be read off-screen and passed to other people. Teachers spoke of engaging with websites in the following ways "looking for inspiration", "time-pressed", "flicking through, seeing what you need, and downloading it".
6. On the language used, it was not so much that teachers didn't understand more academic language, but that it wasn't leaping out of the page and grabbing their attention, and probably wouldn't prompt further reading or clicking if they were flicking through. The suggestion was to frame things in the first

encounter in language which has a strong practical, concrete flavour, linked clearly to examples. The option to explore more in-depth meaning in more academic language is important, but such content is perhaps better located a layer 'down'. This is not to say that key principles and ideas are subsumed under fun-looking schemes of work. Teachers found the ideas important and said they drew them in – it is more that they should be presented in a language that flows more seamlessly from the real-life context of a teacher (which is what they have in their minds as they read).

7. Students said they would appreciate sharing their work on a website (and it would seem sensible to make it possible for them to do this themselves); their ideas about when they might use such a website focused on it being suggested to them by a teacher as a resource for them to find information or get ideas from for a particular piece of work, rather than as something they might surf to in their free time. They were very clear that they like interaction and blogs, but equally firm that they will not be the first to post, and will generally only interact or post on sites that look like they are being used by others. It will thus be important to ensure that when the website is launched it doesn't look like a new, clean sheet.
8. Related to this, one teacher raised the issue of ensuring regular updates so that teachers have reason to go back to the site more than once.
9. One teacher suggested (and this is worth thinking about seriously) that alongside resources such as schemes of work it is important to offer an accompanying explanation of why these things were done this way (which could link very well to the principles or key ideas of the YPG approach), including what conversations were had with students and what emerged from them.
10. The same teacher also thought clear articulation of benefits that have been achieved (student engagement, participation) would engage teachers better than just articulation of aims.

How successful has the project been in year 2 in sustaining conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers and geography teacher educators?

It is evident that the nature and extent of conversations has shifted considerably from year 1 to year 2. In year 2 there were fewer project meetings, and young people were absent from these. This did not mean similar conversations were not occurring, but did seem to cut out the academics from most conversations.

In several schools, conversations between teachers and students with YPG ideas in mind have been sustained, and appear to be more owned by the schools, involving larger numbers of students and teachers, and situated within school contexts and structures rather than in one-off away days. In this sense many conversations have evolved into a form which seems more sustainable than in year 1. The embedding of YPG principles into wider school curricula is a significant achievement both of the staff involved, and for the project as it testifies both to the value teachers perceive in the approach, and to its amenability to such longer-term sustaining strategies.

Two teachers noted that visits by project leaders to school seemed better in terms of being more 'realistic', engaging a wider range of students, and allowing more teachers to feel like they were involved. Another teacher suggested that away days are cumbersome for teachers and students, suggesting again that in-school visits might be a preferable way forward. Undoubtedly the spaces created for establishing the project, sharing and reflecting on progress in year 1 and to a lesser extent in year 2 have been necessary and valuable. Given

reductions in funding over the second phase, and indeed challenges of securing teacher attendance in year 2, a more devolved model of school visits by project leaders (or teachers as mentors) looks to be worth exploring.

In one school year 2 has been used to continue similar activities and reflect on past achievements, with firm plans to continue in the future. In another a focus has been maintained on activities that are student led in areas of geography nominated by students as of interest and relevance to their own lives; here, a wider range of year groups have been involved, and a geography club has also been started with a similar drive.

The lack of contact with academic geographers did not seem to hold teachers back in moving forward with their notions of YPG. The slightly less structured nature of year 2 appears to have given schools space to invest their energies in aspects and directions they felt were important and sustainable. Activity in one school is difficult to trace as the teacher involved has not responded to communication.

No teachers (at least among those who provided feedback so far) felt they lacked appropriate support in year 2. It seems that once a ball is rolling, a relatively light touch follow-up is sufficient for continuation. The YPG approach appears to be sustained more through perceptions and evidence of its value and success than through the prompting of project leaders or impulse of away days. This is very encouraging in terms of long term sustainability, and has implications for expansion in the next phase. Reasons teachers gave for continuing or extending their YPG work included: wanting to better understand young people and their geographies; wanting to engage students through more relevant learning; wanting to help young people learn about and understand their own lived geographies; because it is professionally exciting and engaging; because of enthusiasm from students; because it fitted into a broader curriculum re-development project across a particular key stage. These were often expressed as more of a patchwork of perceived benefits and relationship to specific context, and are testament to the achievements of the YPG approach on a number of dimensions.

Other comments

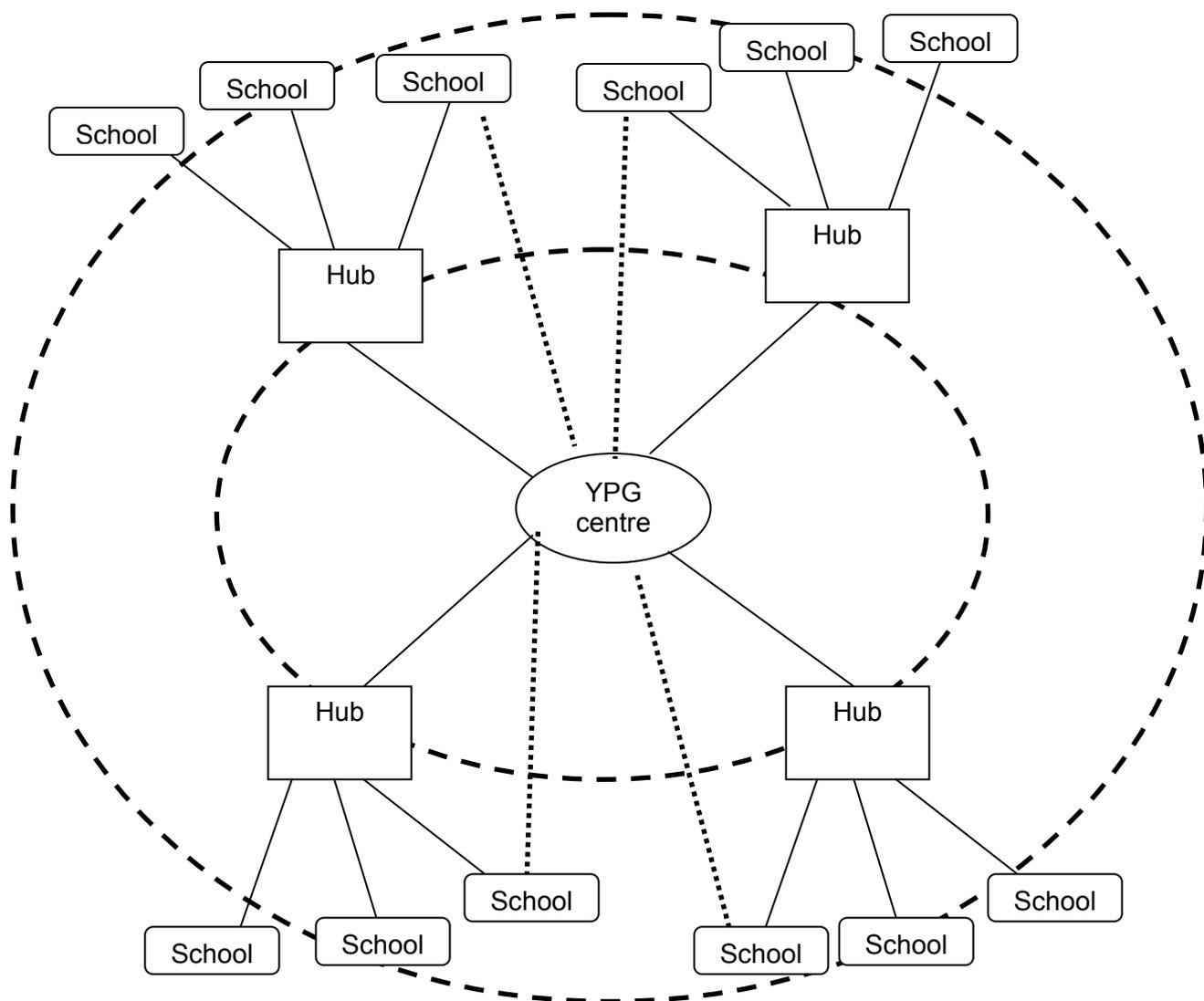
A few additional points have emerged that warrant attention:

1. While some teachers can clearly articulate reasons why they think a YPG approach enhances student learning, others explain benefits with quite specific reference to increased engagement and motivation through relevant content and / or novel and interactive learning activities.
2. In-school, in-context visits appear to be appreciated by teachers more than away days, both in terms of reduced bureaucracy and disruption, but also in terms of providing opportunity for larger numbers of students and staff to engage with people outside the school. Visits by teacher educators, ASTs, academic geographers, and teachers and students from other schools might be considered as part of the next phase.
3. The non-involved teacher spoke frequently of the need to raise awareness across a wider community. Some kind of 'launch' was suggested – this teacher had recently attended a one-day INSET type event around a different new initiative. Several teachers thought an A3 wall planner of some sort with key ideas, reference to the website, examples would be a good way of stimulating initial interest and providing a frequent reminder if stuck on an office wall. In general a cascade model – through heads of

geography in schools to other staff – was often suggested and seems a sensible accompaniment to a ‘flatter’ dissemination through the website.

4. It was clear that association with the GA gave the project/approach an air of quality and importance. Teachers also regularly visit the GA website for inspiration and trust it as a resource. Clear presence of YPG within the GA website is therefore crucial.
5. In terms of expansion / future development, the approach considered in the final meeting seems likely to be productive. An already-involved teacher spoke of the potential for heads of department to attend INSET and then work with their staff, while a non-involved AST could easily imagine involvement as part of her brief, first working in her own school and then engaging a wider community of geography teachers in her area. Both of these illustrate approaches that have potential value in offering a low-cost, sustainable future which capitalises on existing communication channels and professional development networks; in particular they offer capability (but not guarantee) of engaging ‘hard to reach’ teachers.
6. The AST stressed the importance of her having done something herself before engaging with other teachers and schools – the importance of being able to approach people as a ‘real teacher’ working in a ‘real school’, having done something that ‘worked’. This aligns neatly with the emphasis on concrete examples in the website, and suggests the main momentum behind expansion will be demonstrating workability and success of something beneficial in schools rather than buy-in to a more philosophical idea in the first instance. In most cases the deeper ideas embedded in the ‘approach’ are likely to be considered and adopted through engagement in some kind of YPG activity.
7. The importance of continued flexibility in what it means to participate is clear – the website and all other teacher-focused dissemination must present the YPG approach as something that can be applied (at least initially) to a lesson or series of lessons, as well as a module, scheme of work or whole curriculum. Evidence seems to suggest that once involved, teachers feel increasingly confident in the YPG way of thinking, and able to employ it in a range of practical ways – so that experience comes first, and a commitment to fundamental ideas and principles embedded across a wider curriculum may often follow.
8. Finally I would like to offer (on the following page) a schematic representation of how the project might progress, based on the ideas discussed at the final meeting and my conversations with teachers. It is based on a hub-and-spoke idea – channelling energy into regional hubs through direct engagement with the ‘centre’, and then firing spokes off from these. However I have layered on a web like feature which stresses the importance of communication across the system as well as up and down the hub/spoke lines. It was clear that teachers felt it would be important to have easy ‘contact’ with relevant people – either regional AST representatives, or teacher educators – someone they felt they could seek advice from. Funds might therefore be channelled into supporting visits by teacher educators, ASTs, academics into schools. They might also finance visits between schools, or to an annual conference which draws existing and potential future participants together (which might facilitate the setting up of contacts or more/less formal mentoring partnerships). Some funding for hard-copy dissemination such as A3 wall charts or newsletters seems well justified.

A possible schematic representation of YPG networks in years 3 and beyond



Dotted circular lines represent the crucial communication between hubs and between schools – the website is an obvious forum for this, but other suggestions include an annual conference (which might celebrate/ disseminate ongoing work and bring in new teachers), or a hard-copy leaflet or letter sent to heads of geography.

Straight dotted lines indicate interactive engagement with the website and potential communication direct from schools to the centre.

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