

**Geographical Association – Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
Funded Project**

**Making My Place in the World**

Evaluator's Report

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## **Overall conclusions**

This has been an exciting project to be involved in as an evaluator. From the outset, it has been innovative in conception and boldly adventurous in design. It has also been carried out with exemplary enthusiasm and energy – even passion – by the key personalities involved and this has generally had a positive affect on other staff involved and on the key partners: the young people. In my view, the project has broadened attitudes on the value of geography, both in its own right as a discipline and additionally as a vehicle for developing interdisciplinary understanding across the curriculum. This has been the case for both participating staff and for learners. For the most part, the specific project aims have been effectively achieved. In my observation, significant learning has taken place, and highly useable and accessible resources have been developed, notably the Google Maps resource. There have also been exciting spin-off activities in terms of the dissemination of ideas through professional organisations and into the academic world

In practice, the project has experienced some limitations due to the difficulty of finding space in an already tightly circumscribed curriculum space shaped largely by assessment requirements. In my view, this was particularly the case in terms of pre field work preparation. Nevertheless, the key project staff managed to keep participants and partner schools involved throughout by virtue of the strength of their professionalism, credibility of current subject expertise, practical realism, and sheer belief in the value of the project.

In short, this pilot project demonstrates *very considerable* potential for enriching and enhancing young people's reflexive self understanding of their own and others' relationship to their place in the physical, cultural and social world. This is particularly the case for young people who may well not see the world of education as being in tune with the affective geographies of their own lived experience. In my assessment, the project is likely to strengthen attainment of curriculum outcomes at the same time as it achieves a broader encouragement of critically reflective but actively *situated* democratic citizenship. As such, it has a distinctive value and **I recommend that it be rolled out beyond the pilot stage.**

## **1 Introduction**

This report summarises the evaluator findings at the close of the Geographical Association – Paul Hamlyn Foundation Funded Project: Making My Place in the World. It brings together a preliminary view of what the project has achieved and the issues that have been raised for the community geographers, the young people and the school staff who have participated. The aim will be to bring out the strengths and areas of development evident within the project. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of two practice observations covering both geographical hubs of the project – one in Sheffield, one in Greater Manchester – and a series of evaluation conversations framed broadly around a question schedule (see appendices 1 and 2) with school based staff, young people and community geographers. As far as the latter are concerned, there have been regular discussions supplemented by extensive email correspondence.

## **2 Pilot project aims**

As the *Making My Place in the World* project was described to me it set out – quite ambitiously – to explore ways of encouraging GCSE students in four schools from two urban locations (Sheffield & Manchester) to “play a part in their community as active citizens by enabling participation in real world conversations about the places in which they might live”. This overall objective was to be secured by a combination of practical work with teachers and learners in the pilot schools and the creation of an on-line support and resource ‘tool kit’ that would be freely available through the website of the Geographical Association.

The programme of place-based learning took place between September 2011 and July 2012 and was facilitated by the two Community Geographers. The specific pedagogic aim was that young people would be helped to finesse their own geographic vocabulary and develop their speaking and listening skills in general with a view to achieving a more reflexive sense of their own place in the world. At the broadest level, the project would enhance participants’ general self-esteem, strengthen their subject specific confidence, and develop their reflexive self awareness as participants and agents of influence in the world. Specific project aims were emphasised

- Developing a conceptual framework for interrogating places and spaces
- Developing a vocabulary for talking about place
- Learning through enquiry
- Conversations between pupils and place managers

This programme of learning was broadly in tune with my own research on affective geographies as they influence young people’s attitudes to education (see Bright, 2010 for example) and the timing of my involvement was such that I was able to signpost participants to an international seminar on Space, Place and Social Justice in Education that I was co-ordinating and, thus, link the project in to current academic research. Consequently, my evaluation is partly produced in a context of broad peer review by a community of experts from within the field rather than merely from my own perspective.

### **3. Strengths and areas for development**

In collating this report, key strengths and areas for development will be identified by considering evidence from a number of sources: ongoing and final self assessments made by the two community geographers; (CG) reports furnished by staff in the project schools (PS); evidence arising from informal discussion and email communication between the evaluator and the community geographers and the evaluator's own judgements made on the basis of direct observation and questioning of young people and staff.

#### **Strengths**

- ***Ambitious, adventurous but achievable aims:*** Exploring how young people see *their* world, how they talk about *their* places and how *their* actions might have impact effectively requires teachers to relinquish control over the choice of issues and activities and thus takes relationships between staff and students out of the standard comfort zone. This was a key strength of the project throughout.
- ***Empowerment of learners through quickly established relationships*** Relationships between young people and staff established easily and quickly. In the view of one of the CGs, the pupils were sufficiently trusting to express a passionate interest in their topics: "Pupils can be passionate, voicing their concerns about place based issues e.g. the role of CCTV in public / private spaces (School A) money spent on flagship developments when there are homeless people. (School B)"
- ***Extension of geographical vocabulary.*** The range of geographical vocabulary used to describe 'familiar' everyday places was limited at the start of the project but improved to at least to some extent in the view of staff participants. My own discussions with students confirmed that this was the case. The comments from participating schools amplify this point (see below)
- ***Staff knowledge, professionalism and networks***  
Staff knowledge and enthusiastic professional networking was notable on the part of the CGs and has had considerable value added outcomes. One of the Community Geographers has submitted the draft of a chapter for a European book on geomediation in the classroom developed from his Hamlyn Project use of podcasts referenced on Google Maps. The book chapter draft attracted the following editorial review comment

*The editorial committee decided to accept your chapter. Other than your personal impression, your contribution to the book was deemed close to perfect: this was the type of contribution we were looking forward to, and we used your piece as a kind of benchmark. Congratulations for this effort!*

The same individual has up to now run a professional development session for teachers in Stockport and more are scheduled. The session attracted the following comment from an advisor:

*I think your project is much more exciting in that it focuses on what's important in education as well as what's unique in geography. Truly, speaking to you made me want to return to the classroom!*

What is more, the work of the project has been successfully disseminated to international academic and professional audiences. For example, the CGs together contributed a paper that was selected for presentation to the international one day research seminar on *Space, Place and Social Justice in Education* which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2012 at Manchester Metropolitan University. They also contributed a joint paper to the conference *A Child's World - Working Together for a Better Future*, which took place at the University of Aberystwyth on 27-29th June, 2012

- ***Usability and inventiveness of the tool kit***

A set of resources aimed at teachers have been produced and gathered together on the Geographical Association website under the heading 'Making my place in the world'. Visually interesting, user-friendly and easily navigable, the information and resource materials are organised in the following appropriate categories:

About the project  
Starter activities  
Fieldwork  
Classroom activities  
Virtual fieldwork  
Park Hill  
School resources

The material is clearly displayed, informative and intelligently and clearly written. The balance between visual and written material is good. In terms of the accounts of fieldwork, they are factual and reported in a straightforward and informative way. The activities suggested on the web pages are realistic, stimulating and very easily to work with. In my opinion as a non-expert and easily frustrated user, the web pages are superb, overall. Indeed, they offer a highly accessible platform of support for busy teachers who might consult them and constitute a worthwhile, effective and practically useful outcome which, while sufficient in its own right, could easily be developed as the project continues. What is more a highly innovative tool based on Gopogle maps has been developed - see <http://bit.ly/KwUksK>

Other, soon to be available, resources include two short films relating to re-urbanisation from the point of view of people who lived/live in the flats on one of the Sheffield fieldwork sites. The films will be tied to exam specifications on re-urbanisation.

- ***Positive effects on the community geographers***

One of the CGs – a senior professional in HE teacher training – made the following points about positive impact, choosing to make no negative comments:

*[I was] taken out of comfort zone, gained up to date experience at the chalk face. Internally I feel empowered and have a higher status with my PGCE trainees having worked on the Paul Hamlyn project in partnership schools - visibly seen in action by trainees. [Working on the project] broke down some of my assumptions and made me question my silences, my hidden fears of being observed by others as an expert. The project created opportunities to revisit and unpick definitions of key geog concepts. [Other benefits include] working with colleagues who think differently to me, working*

*in new ways collaboratively across the Pennines; visiting new spaces - The Civic, Rock, Sheffield, Huddersfield - adventures with pupils and teachers in new spaces; seeing spaces through others' engagements in those spaces. The project was a timely stage in my personal and professional growth as a researcher - has enhanced my PhD. studies.*

The other CG added:

*The project has certainly challenged me to reflect fundamentally about what, why and how we teach – and I've been at it 30 years. I hope we will make some small positive steps with our work when it is used in schools.*

- ***Positive effects noted by school staff***

Student voice has shown that the majority of the students enjoyed all of the speaking and listening unit of work

Most students felt more confident in taking part in class discussions and using geographical terminology

This confidence in speaking and listening skills also manifested into greater self belief when tackling exam questions.

The end of unit assessment shows significant increase in test scores across the whole cohort.

From my perspective, students were fully engaged with lessons and really enjoyed their learning.

Pupils' understanding and recall of key terms was dramatically improved. There was longevity to the recall

Time constraints, took much longer than normal to teach and therefore an issue at GCSE level.

The improvements seen, clearly demonstrated the values of the skills and the need to incorporate more into schemes of work across the key stages.

The project has achieved what I feel both I and the school wanted from it. It allowed pupils to have an insight into their local area and improved their communication skills as a result of the activities. It also gave some pupils the opportunity to visit an area extremely different to their own and investigate localities different to their own. This is an area which is not really studied as part of the GCSE specification so added a different dimension to their learning.

The role of the Community Geographers was extremely important in ensuring the project had "kudos" with the pupils and it wasn't just seen as another unit of work. Despite some of the activities not being that well received the pupils generally worked well with the Community Geographers and enjoyed sessions with them. If I was to be part of the project again I would want their role to become much bigger and more involved in the day to day teaching of the class. It gives the pupils a chance to engage

with other adults and also gives the project a unique edge compared to other initiatives.

The organisation of the project was overall excellent. Detailed communication occurred by email and letter prior to the start and during the project. Both the Community Geographers acted in a professional manner and had the pupils' wellbeing as a priority at all times. The delivery of sessions with the class were of an appropriate level and generated interest. Some of the activities were innovative and new which helped engage the class.

The funding provided by the project was of major benefit to the school. It allowed me to take the class who had taken part in the project to study Castleton as a rural comparative to Manchester.

The project enabled me, as a Geography Practitioner, to see the combination of academic thinking and practical delivery. Having the input and ideas of people outside of the school environment has enabled me to think about using different teaching methods which can help develop pupils' sense of the "real world" rather than diagrams/powerpoints within the classroom.

The students really seemed to engage with this and found it fun to ask other students for definitions or the teachers something they would rarely be able to do

Another aspect of the lesson that I felt was particularly motivating for the students was that they got to talk more about their learning rather than doing extensive writing.

I feel that their knowledge and vocabulary to describe their local area has improved and as a whole they will benefit during future lessons as their knowledge of the local geography has improved.

- ***Measurable results according to one staff member report***

An increase in progress, from the start of the year to the end of the specific lessons, occurred in 59% of the group. 18% of the class stayed at the same level and 23% of the group did not make any progress at all. This was all based on summative assessment data however. In terms of teacher judgement I believe 18 of the 22 pupils in the class benefitted in terms of their progress. Many acquired new geographical language and also became more aware of issues in their local area, especially regarding CCTV which was a specific focus for the project.

### *Areas for development*

- ***Preparation prior to field work***

Observing the Aston fieldwork, I felt there was a need for more preparatory work to be done before field work. For example, I noticed significant gender differences in the way the learners responded to set tasks. I could see very quickly that some girls were uncomfortable and self-conscious in using video, photographs and Dictaphones and

needed gentle coaching and coaxing. This was confirmed in my discussion with them. However, the school based staff missed it. By the time of the session after lunch, the CG had managed to find time to encourage the girls who were beginning to engage thoughtfully and in a way that meant something to them. With more pre-visit preparation this could have been achieved earlier. At Bury, there were also very significant gender differences in making research presentations. Some of the boys were almost embarrassingly diffident. With greater preparation they could have rehearsed the presentations so the event built their confidence rather than challenged it". These issues were noticed by the CGs:

*"At Aston we noticed a need for trust building which they'd done with other pupils but had been unable to do with Aston young people. The Aston focus was on Sheffield Sustainability but the y/p hadn't really got the vocabulary" (CGs). We were "concerned about development and admin time under the surface" necessary for effective preparation and how it might be balanced between the parties to the project (CGs).*

- ***Balance between school based staff and CGs***

In both sessions that I observed, there was a slight sense of the school based staff being very supportive of the project while not quite being able to give it their full creative attention. This should not be seen as pinpointing any issue with either the staff or the project, but rather as related to the generally harassed nature of the curriculum. Consequently, the CGs shouldered too much responsibility for managing the learning while the school staff seemed to become spectators to some extent. While the school staff had bought into the project at an organisational level I'm not sure that they had been able to fully think through the pedagogic implications of their involvement. Consequently, they didn't seem fully prepared to intervene thoughtfully in supporting learning as ad hoc opportunities arose.

- **Limited and irregular time frame of the project.**

Given the time frame of the pilot, there were inevitably some issues as picked here: "As we discovered, the overall impact of 9 lessons was limited" (PS). "The periodic visits from the community geographers did not pose a problem to me but the lack of regularity caused some confusion as to what they should be doing week to week. A more structured programme would have enhanced this and made the visits more meaningful"



## **Appendix 1**

### **Paul Hamlyn Making my Place in the World Project**

#### **Schedule of Interview Prompts – Young People**

How did you get involved in the Making my Place in the World Project?

Did the project feel like ‘geography’ to you?

How was it different?

Was it more or less enjoyable; harder or easier?

What did you think about working with the ‘community geographers’?

How could the project have been better?

Do you notice places more than you did? Do you *see* things differently?

Do you *think* about places in any different way than you did before?

Have you learned any new ways to describe places?

Tell me how you decide whether a place is a good place or a bad place; a place where you want to go or don't want to go?

Would you like to do more work like this in future?

Do you think places change? What is that changes them?

I think some of you went on a visit. Did you go? (if not, why not?)

What did the visit to Castleton make you think about the everyday places you know when you came back? Did you see your own places differently?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Paul Hamlyn Making my Place in the World Project**

#### **Schedule of Interview Prompts – Staff**

How did you get involved in the Making my Place in the World Project?

Did the project feel as if it would compliment and support your work?

Did it feel different from geography-as-usual?

What have you gained as a teacher by being involved?

How has the relationship with the ‘community geographers’ developed?

Do you think the pupils are more aware of place than they were? Do they see things differently, think differently, articulate things differently? What is the evidence?

Has *your* understanding of *their* places changed in any way?

Has the project extended the range of your own learning strategies in any way?

What do you think the students have learned? Is it superficial or deep learning? Do they ‘perform’ better?

I think you organised a visit. How effective was that as a strategy for deepening learners’ understanding of space?

What could/should have been done differently? How could the project have been improved to meet your needs?