NEW SCHOOL GEOGRAPHIES:

Engaging young people?

Submitted by Helen Gwyneth Griffiths, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography, September 2009.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.
Abstract

In 2003 school geography was in a state of crisis: enrolment in GCSE\textsuperscript{1} geography courses had fallen by a third over the previous eight years. In response, a radical new ‘pilot’ geography GCSE course was designed and implemented in England. The GCSE was an attempt to rejuvenate a school subject that had become out of date, with little change to its content since the inauguration of the National Curriculum in 1988. With student-centred learning at its heart the GCSE aimed to make the subject much more exciting and relevant to young people.

The following thesis examines alternative pedagogical approaches to teaching school geography that draw on young people’s experiences as citizens and consumers to make geography more relevant and interesting to them. Written as an unfolding story this multi-sited ethnography began by exploring the networks behind the pilot. This involved not only several different actors/groups of actors (including geography educators, academic geographers, geography teachers and school pupils) but also several different spaces (including schools, classrooms, organisation headquarters, working group meetings and publications). It moves on to examine how the GCSE’s approaches to teaching, learning and assessing were being played out in practice and to what extent its aims, claims and intentions were being realised in the classroom. Through exploring the pilot’s approach to the pedagogy of school geography my research became action-oriented in approach, and I became involved in co-creating critical, connective curriculum materials for the GCSE. The development of these new materials and teaching and learning strategies are situated within debates in human geography about critical pedagogy, young people’s geographies and public geographies and the thesis forges links between these different theoretical strands. I conclude by asking what lessons can be learnt from the pilot GCSE and its implications for the role of geography within a wider educational context. Written autoethnographically to reflect the collaborative and iterative nature of my research my intention has been to critically engage with multiple publics who are involved in this area.

\textsuperscript{1} GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education- these are a set of qualifications that pupils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland study for from ages 14-16.
Acknowledgements

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do things a bit differently. Without Ian’s encouragement and confidence in me as my
undergraduate dissertation supervisor I have no doubt that I would have fled academia
straight away. When I took that Geographies of Material Culture module all those years
ago I could never have imagined working with you guys seven years on. I miss ‘the
team’ already.

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academia more widely both inspired and encouraged me. His later involvement and
publications in public geographies really helped shaped my research. When I had doubts
about whether there was any point in doing academic research, I remembered his mantra
to take a bit of a risk, get involved, do things a bit differently and do something I really
believed in that could hopefully make a difference within/outside the academy.

A huge heart-felt thanks to my mum, dad, sisters, Noble family and friends for their
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# Table of Contents

Approval Page .......................................................................................................................... 1  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... 3  
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... 4  
List of Figures and Illustrations ............................................................................................... 7  
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................................... 9  

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 10  
1.1 A Crisis in Geography? ................................................................................................. 10  
1.2 Children’s Geographies Matter .................................................................................. 14  
1.3 My School and University Geography ......................................................................... 20  
1.4 Paulo Freire and Critical Pedagogy ............................................................................. 24  
1.5 Research, Serendipity and the Pilot GCSE ................................................................... 29  
1.6 Formation of a Topic: doing ethnography .................................................................... 36  
1.6.1 ‘Rhizomatic ethnography’ ....................................................................................... 41  
1.6.2 Situating the Pilot in Context .................................................................................. 43  
1.6.3 Examining the Pilot in Theory and Practice ............................................................ 48  
1.6.4 Co-Creating Curriculum Materials ......................................................................... 50  
1.7 Writing as Method: an autoethnographic sensibility to writing .................................. 54  
1.8 Concluding Thoughts ..................................................................................................... 61  

CHAPTER TWO: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY ..................... 64  
2.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 64  
2.2 The Development of School Geography Years ............................................................ 66  
2.3 Innovation, Innovation, Innovation ............................................................................. 74  
2.4 Regulation, Regulation, Regulation .............................................................................. 79  
2.5 The National Curriculum, Governance and School Geography .................................. 85  
2.6 Time for Change ............................................................................................................. 91  
2.7 Signs of Change: Green Paper and GeoVisions ............................................................ 97  
2.8 Concluding Thoughts ..................................................................................................... 102  

CHAPTER THREE: THE PILOT GEOGRAPHY GCSE ..................................... 105  
3.1 A ‘lively and innovative’ GCSE ..................................................................................... 105  
3.2 The Modules ................................................................................................................... 111  
3.3 Support for Pilot Teachers ............................................................................................ 115  
3.4 Innovative Assessment .................................................................................................. 118  
3.5 Engaging Young People ............................................................................................... 122  
3.6 A Less Exclusive Geography ....................................................................................... 124  
3.7 A Critical, Deeper Approach to Learning ..................................................................... 126  
3.8 Re-establishing Links between Academic and School Geographies ......................... 128  
3.9 New Public Geographies? ............................................................................................ 135  
3.10 Public Geographies and School Geographies ............................................................. 141  
3.11 Concluding Thoughts .................................................................................................. 143  

CHAPTER FOUR: ST EDMUND CAMPION SCHOOL CASE STUDY ................ 147  
4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 147  
4.1.1 Sowing the Seeds for the Case Study ........................................................................ 148  
4.1.2 Mixing up Reading and Doing ................................................................................ 151  
4.2 St Edmund Campion Case Study ................................................................................. 151  

4
7.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 302
7.2 Why I couldn’t write my conclusions until after my viva .................................... 303
7.3 Can you explain your methodology and why you chose it over another? .......... 304
7.4 Do you see your thesis as a form of ‘public geography’? ..................................... 306
7.5 If you do research in this way, what does it mean when it comes to writing up? .................................................................................................................. 308
7.6 Reflections on research aims......................................................................................... 310

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................. 317
  Appendix One: Timetable of Empirical ‘Evidence’ ...................................................... 317
  Appendix Two: St Edmund Campion Lesson Plans...................................................... 320

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................... 332
## List of Figures and Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The 'closed system' (from Rawling, 2001a)</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>GCSE and A-Level numbers for geography, 1996-2003 (source: Rawling, 2004a)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>GeoVisions Dispositions (source: GeoVisions, 1999)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>'Fugis' (source: <a href="http://www.tidec.org/Tide-talk/network%20arts/learn-converse.html">http://www.tidec.org/Tide-talk/network%20arts/learn-converse.html</a>)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>The Geography Classroom at SEC (Credit: James Evans, 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2006)</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Shelley Sacks’ <em>Exchange Values: Images of invisible lives</em>, University of Central England (now BCU) International Performance Space, April 2004. (Source: authors own photographs)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Pupils searching for ‘made in’ labels (Credit: James Evans, 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2006)</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>PowerPoint slide from SEC lesson, 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2006</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>PowerPoint slideshow from SEC lesson, 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2006</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>SEC group performances, performance day at University of Birmingham (Source: stills from video recording, 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006)</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>The parallel worlds of SEC and GMC students, performance day University of Birmingham (Source: stills from VoxPops, 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2006)</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Sherry’s email to, and reply from, the WTO, March, 2006 (Source: photocopy of original with Sherry’s permission)</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Students recording their VoxPops for academic geographers, SEC school. (Source: stills from VoxPop recording, 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March)</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Making the Connection post on SLN. (Source: Noel Jenkins, 24/01/2007) Pilot GCSE resources, SLN Geography Forum, Website accessed 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2007, <a href="http://active.sln.org.uk/ubb/Forum5/HTML/008649.html">http://active.sln.org.uk/ubb/Forum5/HTML/008649.html</a>)</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Glebe School (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>The nature area in the Quad (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>The raised beds in the Quad (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>Students helping to build the polytunnel (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Sending a letter to the local council (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>Showing younger students how to plant potatoes (Source: Glebe School)</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 21 At the farmer’s market (Source: Glebe School) ........................................... 249

Figure 22 The Collaborative Learning Cycle designed by Paul Maiteny (Source: Crabbe, 2005: 47) .................................................................................................. 253

Figure 23 Students’ own version of the Collaborative Learning Cycle (source: Crabbe, 2005: 49) .................................................................................................. 254

Figure 24 Students showing Waitrose visitors round the Quad and Allotment (Source: authors own photographs) ........................................................................... 260

Figure 25 School council meeting with Waitrose (Source: authors own photograph) . 261

Figure 26 Alan’s blog entry mentioned Making the Connection (Source: Alan Parkinson, 24/01/2007) ......................................................................................... 280
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CWG</td>
<td>Citizenship Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCSF</td>
<td>Department for Children, Schools and Families (from 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills (from 2001-2007)</td>
</tr>
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<td>GA</td>
<td>Geographical Association</td>
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<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education (from 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMC</td>
<td>Geographies of Material Culture: 3rd year undergraduate module at the University of Birmingham run by Ian Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNC</td>
<td>Geography National Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>GWG</td>
<td>Geography Working Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IoE</td>
<td>Institute of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>Key Stage</td>
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<td>NC</td>
<td>National Curriculum</td>
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<td>PGWG</td>
<td>Public Geographies Working Group</td>
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<td>OCR</td>
<td>Oxford, Cambridge &amp; RSA Examinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ofsted</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (prior to April 2007 known as the Office for Standards in Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCA</td>
<td>Qualification and Curriculum Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGS-IBG</td>
<td>Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLN</td>
<td>Staffordshire Learning Net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tide~</td>
<td>Teachers in Development Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td>Young People’s Geographies Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>