

My YPG Blog

(On the GA Ning!)



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Blog Entry 1: The first blog...thoughts on the first YPG meeting

November 17th's YPG launch meeting for the Sheffield schools was very motivating and inspiring (and also nice to catch up with some faces from the recent and distant past!). I came away with loads of ideas flying around my head and lots of random scribbles written down of lesson ideas for my current teaching groups. Now that I've had time to sort things out and do some initial research, I think I may have an idea for my YPG project (hurrah!). I'd like to get a group of my Y9 students looking at the geography of our school catchment area at Tapton (mainly Ranmoor, Crosspool, Crookes, Walkley and Netherthorpe). There's a definite split between the more affluent background kids from the Crosspool area and the less affluent of Netherthorpe. It would be really interesting to pair the kids up in pairs that are from different parts of the catchment area (ie one kid from Crosspool with one kid from Netherthorpe) and let them investigate what life is like in other parts of the catchment area. They could do a days shadowing of each other at the weekend, taking photos, or possibly video recording. It would be interesting to see how familiar kids are with other parts of the catchment than their own, as well as the preconceptions they have and whether or not they are valid! Not sure about the mechanics of introducing this yet, but hey, it's a start!

Blog Entry 2: Progress...

It's been a while since my last blog entry, mainly due to the usual wear and tear of the term leading up to Christmas! I have got an idea now though that I think may work with my group for the YPG scheme. I tried the idea out on two of my year 7 groups this week. The "lesson" is P4C based and involves the use of a map of Tapton School catchment area as a stimulus. The map has the names of main areas of the catchment highlighted. The students are seated in a circle and have some quiet time to think up questions that they would like to ask about the catchment area. They then discuss their ideas with the person next to them. They then pair and share again in fours. Then, as a four they select their most interesting question. This is written onto a post it note (no names) and stuck onto the board. Each student individually then has 2 votes which they can allocate to any of the questions. The question with the most votes wins. This question is then discussed by the group as a whole in the circle, starting with the group whose question won the vote. One student acts as the host and decides who gets to speak next. As you may imagine, the discussions can meander in many directions and do need some control at times with timely interventions from myself, but the idea is to contribute just like the rest of the group and not be the "teacher".

The two winning questions from the trial with my year 7's were "Why does Uppertorpe have a bad reputation?" and "What's the difference between Uppertorpe and Netherthorpe?". The discussions certainly opened up some very large cans of worms! Each group had a good mixture of students from different parts of the catchment, including Uppertorpe, Netherthorpe, Fulwood, Crookes and Ranmoor. The topics of crime, graffiti and gangs came up very quickly. Some particularly good discussions came up on why Uppertorpe in particular has such a label as a dangerous place and how that label affects life in school. A lot of students were of the opinion that this was an unjust label and there are many other areas much worse than this, such as Burngreave. What was interesting was that students from Fulwood and Ranmoor thought this too, even though they are from the more affluent parts of the catchment. The Uppertorpe/Netherthorpe difference question also tended to get to a similar conclusion after 5 or 10minutes.

The discussions seemed to work well and the students certainly got involved in them. I plan to use this as the stimulus lesson with the Y9's that I intend to do my YPG project with. Hopefully they may come up with some more complex and open ended questions and discussions. The range of questions developed hopefully will be useful for the students to develop ideas about what they would investigate about the catchment area over the series of lessons. I plan to get the students from one class into groups working

on a question and investigating it over a series of lessons. I will give them a list of equipment available to use, along with some guidelines on how to structure an enquiry and how they may wish to collect/present/analyse their findings.

I hope to discuss and develop these ideas further this coming weekend with Jane, Hannah, Dean and Mary for our Sheffield Group meeting at Pizza Express! It's certainly nice to have got the ball rolling though.

Blog Entry 3: The first meeting of the Sheffield Group

We had our first Sheffield group meeting today over lunch at Pizza Express! It was great to exchange ideas and discuss progress with Jane, Dean, Hannah and Mary. Progress really seems to be being made and the projects will hopefully start to really move forward after Christmas. I'm particularly interested to see how Dean's Australia-UK comparison of personal geography and local area geography will turn out.

I plan to start my project after half term as my Y9 groups all have assessment weeks straight after Christmas. Mary is very keen to come in and see the projects get started, and I think it would be great if she could see the initial P4C session to start my project off - the Year 7 trials went well and I have great hopes for the real thing with Y9's! We've arranged to meet again in early March and this will hopefully allow us to discuss some findings and check up on our progress. I hope to get to use the new consignment of technology that has just arrived in our dept - 10 digital cameras and 5 Flipcams - these will hopefully be available for the students to use in their projects.

I've also gained a few ideas of websites to use, such as "Follow the thing" by Ian Cook, as well as the TASC wheel for planning an investigation (thanks Dean!) which seems to be similar to the accelerated learning framework for planning and could be quite useful.

Hopefully over the Christmas period I can get my ideas down into some format for the series of lessons for the project - a few guidance sheets similar to Jo Cooper's that we saw at the initial launch meeting are the kind of thing I'm thinking of. A bit of a Christmas rest first though!

Blog Entry 4: The project begins!

After some frenzied planning over the last few weeks, the ball has finally started rolling on my YPG project with my Year 9 group. The first lesson was today, which was a P4C lesson. The stimulus was a map of the Tapton school catchment area with the main areas labeled upon it. Students developed and then voted on questions that they would ask about the catchment area. The most popular question with the most votes was "which is the most popular area that people come from?". This question was then discussed following the P4C format. It took a little while to get going, but some big issues started to come out from the group linked to the reputation of certain parts of the school catchment area and how students from the perceived "posher" areas saw them. The group consists of 17 students from Crosspool and Lodge Moor, the more affluent areas of the Tapton catchment. The group also consisted of around 5 students from the Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe areas of Sheffield, areas with a label within Tapton school as being a little more dangerous. Some good discussion about areas that have "bad reputations" ensued, with arguments that only bad things get reported by the media and that little is made of the vast numbers of people from these "dangerous areas" that have never experienced any trouble. Points were also made that muggings, robbery and public disorder also occurs in the Crosspool area - these points were made by Crosspool students too. Many of the students did agree that visiting areas outside of their own home area of the catchment was an intimidating experience though. These topics of discussion will now hopefully form a stimulus for my students in their upcoming lesson on Thursday. In this session the students will hopefully come up with a focus for their study. I will provide students with a proposal form to fill in and

get them thinking about the design of their project and how they will carry it out, what equipment and any research that they may do and how they may present their findings. Hopefully then it is onwards and upwards!

Blog Entry 5: Project Proposals

Today was the second lesson in my YPG project with my Y9 group. The session began by me showing the group a summary of key discussion points from Monday's P4C session. I then outlined the project to the students using a project outline sheet, as well as showing them the YPG website where we will hopefully be discussing progress on the projects. Students then wrote down individual ideas for projects on post it notes. I then asked students to move around and describe their idea to 5 other people in the group, with the aim of getting ideas flowing! I then asked students to choose groups that they would like to work in, anywhere between 1 and 4. Most students chose groups of 3 or 4, with a few pairs. I then got the groups to fill in proposal forms that I had created for them to outline their project ideas, describing a brief title, what will be investigated, what information might be collected, what equipment may be used and how the findings might be presented. I will give feedback to groups next time with any further pointers on the planning of their projects.

Some interesting project titles have been created! One group of boys decided that they would like to look at the withdrawal room list from Tapton School and map where these students are from and if there is any pattern. One pair has decided to look at why Crosspool has its "posh" reputation and will take photos of the characteristics of the housing, shops and environment. One group of students is going to investigate what students really think about Upperthorpe and Crosspool, conducting interviews using Flipcams. One group of girls intends to investigate how where you are from may influence what people may think of you, again by conducting interviews.

One group of boys are going to investigate the layout of 2 local areas - Lodge Moor and Crosspool, as they had noticed that one area feels very closed in and the other had lots of open space. Another group intend to investigate vandalism and crime in the same 2 areas as the boys above, taking photos and interviewing local residents about their views. They intend to produce a collage of photos and comments to show their findings. The final pair of girls intend to see how alike Crosspool and Netherthorpe are by researching internet data on crime as well as conducting interviews with students, hoping to see if the poor reputation of Netherthorpe is justified or not.

I also sent students away with a letter to take home to explain to parents what will be happening with the YPG project, as well as encouraging them to get involved too!

The next session is on Monday, when I will ask students to start creating any resources that they need for their investigation, as well as getting the finer details together for what they will be doing. Hopefully by the end of Monday's session students will really be able to start moving on their projects!

Looking forward to discussing progress with Jane, Hannah and Dean on Saturday at Pizza Express!

Blog Entry 6: First Findings

My students brought some of their findings to our session on the Tapton Geography Project today. I really enjoyed the session as it was all action and lots of different things were going on! The interviews with the Flipcams had been started by the group looking into the reputation of Upperthorpe and Netherthorpe and continued during the lesson, with two of the group interviewing students in other classrooms, kindly let in by other Geography and RE teachers! The vandalism and graffiti group had taken some good photos

from one of their areas and had a good lesson putting together their photos and developing questionnaires to supplement their project. The boys measuring the space and sense of openness in two areas had taken some photos and were using OS maps to measure the 2 areas, as well as starting a PowerPoint. The guys also made the first contributions to the Tapton Forum on the YPG website - hopefully these will snowball in the future! The two girls looking at crime figures between 2 areas worked hard looking for data from websites like UpMyStreet and beginning to look for patterns in the data. Two other girls conducting questionnaires about how posh Crosspool is had collected some data and went off to create more questionnaires in the library so that they had a larger sample to use.

The ideas in the groups seem to be changing and developing extensions and additional parts all the time as the students get more and more involved. There was a lot of enthusiasm shown today and hopefully this will continue as time progresses into next week. I'm hoping that some of the students may make posts on the forum over the weekend after some final words of encouragement at the end of today's session. We'll have to wait and see!

Blog Entry 7: Feeling Guilty...

It's been a little (!) while since my last blog post (hence the title!), mainly due to interviews and giving associated feedback, coursework marking, GCSE planning, meetings and controlled assessment planning, Iceland trip organising and re-organising...and all the rest! So here are a few final thoughts on my YPG project...

The students finished their projects and presented them in the week before Easter. The projects varied in their appearance, from amazing films with music and comments edited in, to simple posters with good old fashioned cutting and sticking...all were effective at showing exactly what students had found though.

The comparing graffiti in two areas of Sheffield project found that both areas had quite a bit of graffiti when you actually looked closely, which surprised the group as they thought the "more dodgy" areas would have had more. They produced an excellent and very funny film with music and quirky comments to show this.

The group comparing crime levels between Netherthorpe/Upperthorpe and Crosspool found that there was very little difference in crime levels between the 2 areas - again completely against what they had expected - the girls presented their findings in a very structured, more technical report style, with graphs and analysis.

The group who looked at Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe and their reputations got quite passionate about their project and really seemed to develop some pride in their home area - they really battled against the poor reputation that these areas have and produced a poster showing the good aspects about these 2 areas, using pictures and questionnaires, as well as some Flipcam produced videos of students being interviewed in school.

The final two groups presented their findings via posters but could have developed a lot more than what they finally produced, which was slightly disappointing. One group focused on the idea of "space" in two areas and comparing the findings (I'm not sure what they actually found!) and the other group looked at comparing the housing in the two areas and produced a collage of pictures comparing two different areas, which did look pretty good and they really seemed to enjoy it, even though what they did was very simple and what many students might consider as being a bit boring (?) - then again, I suppose that's the nature of what I set out to achieve - it's their geography!

The presentations went pretty well and were spread over 2 lessons in the final week of term. I brought in

cakes and nibbles for the two sessions, which went down very well (surprising that). I also got students to fill in some evaluation sheets in the first lesson back after Easter, asking them about their projects, how they had gone, whether they had enjoyed them, had they found anything out that was useful and so on... I also asked them to fill in a few questions on our YPG website forum, which yielded some good comments (and took our posts to 34, **way more** than any other forum! Ha!

I have to say I really enjoyed the project too - particularly the lessons while they were collecting and collating their information and research - they were action packed and sometimes a little chaotic (particularly with technology involved!), but there was a great buzz and atmosphere within the room. It was really nice to give students the ownership of what they wanted to base their projects on too, which really seemed to spark a few normally passive students into life on a Monday morning! This has carried on with a number of students now that "normal" service has resumed - this is clearly something that could make a massive impact in the future.

Now that I'm a HOD for next year, I'm very much incorporating the YPG project ideas into my new KS3 curriculum planning and development for Tapton School. Our curriculum is very much dated and nothing was done this year for Year 7 as far as new ideas go, but with myself as new head of department and two new talented geographers in the department as well, hopefully we can build YPG into our programmes of study starting from September.

I'm now looking forward to the July meeting at the GA - I have a market stall to prepare in the meantime though! I'm on the lookout for one of those old fashioned style barrows that I could use as a prop! Before that, Jane, Hannah, Dean and I have a Sheffield working group dinner date a week on Saturday, where we will be showing off all of our projects - Pizza Express will be swamped in a sea of posters, films and Geography!