Welcome to the first PGR GCYFRG Newsletter

by Amy Mulvenna and Rachel Searcey (GCYFRG Post-Grad Reps)

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Hello! We are Amy and Rachel, your postgraduate reps. Our role is to share information and new developments in the field between us all, and we have decided to produce an electronic newsletter that gives PGR students a special platform. We hope to provide lots of information on upcoming events, books, journal articles, training and conferences that may be of interest to you; but more importantly, this is your newsletter: an open space for YOU to share YOUR research. So please, get involved and email us your ideas, opinions and suggestions!

A regular section of the newsletter will be SPOTLIGHT - an interview with a committee member followed by an academic working in the field of GCYF. If you would like to know more about a particular academic or know anyone out there that you would like to include in the newsletter, please let us know.

AND FINALLY...

We would like to promote any training, events, conferences and ideas for April’s issue. If you know of any that would be of particular interest to fellow PGRs, please don’t hesitate to email us!

In this issue:

> Committee SPOTLIGHT - Dr Sarah Mills - GCYFRG Committee Chair
> Workshop and Conference Reports
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  - Materialities and Mobilities in Education (University of Oxford)
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> This Month’s Top Tip - the Thesis Whisperer
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What do you enjoy most about your role on the GCYFRG Committee?

GCYFRG has provided a real community and wider network of support as I’ve moved through my postgraduate, postdoctoral and academic career. An elected role on the GCYFRG committee has been an opportunity to drive and collaborate on a number of activities, events and initiatives to support that work first-hand, and I’ve really enjoyed working with a fantastic group of individuals across different career stages and institutions.

What is your research about?

My research focuses on geographies of youth citizenship and informal education and engages with debates in cultural, political and historical geography. I’ve mainly explored a range of youth organisations in historical and contemporary contexts and the wider relationship between the state and voluntary sector through the lens of these youth spaces.

When was the last time you laughed?

This morning! I think most people that know me well would say I’m generally happy and smiley 😊

What is the last novel or autobiography you read?

The last novel I read was The Cuckoo’s Calling - one of the Strike novels by Robert Galbraith / J K Rowling. It was my last holiday read and I would recommend it!

What is the last journal article you read?

The latest Progress in Human Geography report in historical geography (III) by Cheryl McGeachan called ‘hope persists’ – it is fantastic!

What do you prefer research or teaching?

This is impossible to answer! I genuinely love both, but of course each has their own challenges and demands. The best blend is when the two come together - so research-informed teaching is something I’m very passionate about, if I can bring examples from fieldwork or certain topics into the classroom as part of wider modules.
What did you want to be growing up?

I changed my mind a lot, and I’m glad I followed different subjects at school and sixth form based on what I enjoyed at the time. At various points, I wanted to be an illustrator, a music teacher, a journalist…a whole range of things really!

Tea or Coffee?

Coffee – I think the average consumption of coffee in the PhD office in Aberystwyth dropped dramatically when I finished my thesis!

What is the focus of your most recent research?

My latest research focuses on character education and is called ‘mapping the moral geographies of education’. I think the spatialities of character education and its historical and contemporary dynamics are fascinating, and I hope to share this new work soon…

Facebook or Twitter?

Twitter…definitely!

What are you most proud of?

I’m proud of some recent parliamentary forums I’ve been involved with, but I’m also proud of PhD students and my former PDRA who have carved out academic or non-academic careers, and hearing about their progress! This year I’m proud of my football team – Wolverhampton Wanderers – and cautiously optimistic about a return to the Premiership, but this might come back to bite me.

Thanks to Sarah for her time and fascinating responses!

WORKSHOP REPORT (i)

Educating under- and post-graduate geographers for/about/using the geographies of children and youth

>> GCYFRG Workshop 10th January 2018

Bring a group of Geographers and Educationalists together to talk about pedagogy on a chilly Wednesday morning in early January, and one might not expect rousing enthusiasm. And yet, the energies and ideas that coalesced at this teaching workshop on 10th January surpassed possibly even organiser John McKendrick’s expectations! This RGS-IBG sponsored workshop welcomed academic (teaching) staff, early career researchers and postgraduates – both within the field and beyond – to a day-long event encompassing various presentations, discussions, Q&A; and, happily, a field trip.

John (Glasgow Caledonian University) welcomed the group with a round of Bingo that played to our eclectic interests (and eccentricities!), neatly foregrounding the point that we carry these differences through our teaching practice. Addressing the teaching of children and youth geographies in the UK and Ireland specifically, John discussed recent statistical analyses that presents geographies of children and youth as increasingly ‘on the map’ in HE institutions. Once a niche sub-discipline, John
stressed that growing interdisciplinary visibility warrants in depth and nuanced attention to both teaching and learning and assessment at HE level.

With this in mind, Joe Hall (Brighton University) then introduced us to a design model for a children’s geographies module. Several innovations were noted, not least the move from standard lecture formats towards role-play to motivate questioning and discussion between undergraduates and lecturers (e.g. what makes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ethics in research with children and youth?).

Sympathetic to the demands and strictures of HE timetabling, Matt Finn (University of Exeter) next asked us to think about opportunities for ‘mainstreaming’ specific children’s geographies sessions within undergraduate Geography modules more broadly; an approach that might arguably lend itself to a more inclusive HE curriculum. Sophie Hadfield-Hill echoed this sentiment where she explained the efforts of colleagues at University of Birmingham to embed non/more-than-representational theory and methodologies throughout their teaching of children and youth geographies.

The ensuing ‘breakout’ session proved a productive time for reflection, as we scurried to various corners of the room to share and conceive of novel teaching approaches that might be usefully deployed by our colleagues. Discussions around the use of TV and film, picture books and children’s literature to elucidate key concepts proved fascinating. Playing with mediums for/of (re)presentation was a popular discussion point, too. Colleagues suggested that students might make use of more visual techniques and strategies to explore and critique stereotypes of youth and tropes of childhood. Indeed, with the increasing trend from formal to horizontal assessments, and with focus on student-centred learning, creative approaches such as these yield much scope.

Tara Woodyer’s presentation was an apt and insightful follow up, as she explained the creative (re)thinking of the use of student blogs in teaching and assessment of children’s geographies at the University of Portsmouth. Contemporary job markets demand much of students, explained Tara, not least in terms of digital literacy. Experimenting with different modes of assessment and approaches to communication, this innovative model not only foregrounds student-centred learning, but also an interactive and motivated approach to knowledge (co)-production, exchange, and shaping of ideas. Check out the following examples of students’ blogging:

https://gcypblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/15/whatsapp-with-todays-subcultures/


https://gcypblog.wordpress.com/2017/01/31/child-soldiers-should-we-protect-or-prosecute/

Relational approaches to teaching primary Geography with the UK and Ireland were the focus for both Susan Pike (Dublin City University), and Helen Clarke and Sharon Witt (University of Winchester). Following a ‘Common Worlds’ approach that emphasises enchantment, playfulness and paying attention with the world, both presentations affirmed the centrality of practical wisdoms, positive enquiry, and hopeful geographies. Follow @Attention2Place to find out more about Helen and Sharon’s work, and discover the wealth of insight offered by post human perspectives on teaching and learning about childhood.
Lunch was followed up by a comparative take on supervising children’s geographies dissertations, with Sarah Mills (Loughborough University) and Sophie Hadfield-Hill (University of Birmingham). The opportunities and (ethical) challenges posed by dissertation topics created much debate: How might we manage the expectations and experiences of undergraduate researchers? And how can we navigate stringent ethical clearance and protocols to best support our students and their research participants? Sarah and Sophie suggested differently nuanced ways to approach these issues, and, given the wealth of excellent undergraduate dissertation subjects produced to date, foregrounded the significance of sustained research at undergraduate level in carrying the sub-discipline forwards.

To close a day of much discussion, debate and reflection, it was apt that we went for a walk. Or, more specifically, a field trip to Hyde Park. Guided by John’s directions and prompts – a model of active learning – we journeyed in pairs and small groups, chatting, thinking, listening, and observing as we went, contemplating the park and city more broadly as a springboard for questioning. We debated what constitutes ‘children’s spaces’, considered factors that shape children’s use of space (limited or otherwise), and were encouraged to interrogate ways in which children’s lives are shaped by their environments. Arriving back in time for tea (it should be noted that no-one was lost en-route!), it was agreed that today may be a first of many such opportunities to come: to make time and space for collaboration with colleagues beyond our own departments; to enliven, and continue to move the teaching of children and youth geographies forwards.
On Monday 6th November 2017, the Connectors Study team organised the Making Connections workshop, a day-long training event for doctoral, early career and freelance researchers led by Melissa Nolas and Christos Varvantakis. An cross-disciplinary group of 30 (many doctoral researchers, some early career researchers, and other freelancers and charity workers) came together at Candid Arts Trust in Islington, London to think through and experiment with the Connectors Study multimodal data as well as participants’ own data.

The workshop and accompanying exhibition was an illuminating - and interactive! - tour through the multimodal and sensual dimensions of ethnographic research. We were surrounded by artefacts, many related to the exhibition of children’s artworks from the Connectors Study (2014-2019) that showcased artworks by young participants from Athens, London and Hyderabad. Their drawings, mappings and photo stories document emergent relationships between childhood and public life - what the researchers refer to as ‘idioms of Childhood Publics’.

Throughout the day, we chattered and shared thoughts, struggles, and successes when working multimodally. There was lots of lively discussion around what works well in developing, using and presenting findings from multimodal, ethnographic research-creation - findings that may be complex and oblique entanglements of movements, affects and sensations.

Given the energy, verve and colour of the workshop, it is apt that the day’s events have gathered something of an online ‘hereafter’. One of the exhibits with which we were invited to interact asked participants to record their ‘earliest political memory’. At the time of writing, 96 memories are archived on the Making Connections website.

The exhibition now travels to Athens, Greece 11-15 February. The Connectors Study moved to the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths College, London, from January 1, 2018.

In the meantime, keep your eyes open: the team will be running another training workshop, ‘Making Connections: an introduction to multimodal ethnography’, for graduate, post-graduate and early careers researcher in Spring 2018 and dates for that will be announced on the study website in due course https://connectorsstudy.com
Discovering the exhibition at Candid Arts Trust, Islington.
CONFERENCE REPORT

>> MATERIALITIES AND MOBILITIES IN EDUCATION

Convenors: Johanna Waters (University of Oxford) & Rachel Brooks (University of Surrey)
Sponsored by the Transformations: Economy, Society and Place research cluster (SoGE)

This one-day event, hosted by the School of Geography and Environment, University of Oxford, brought together around 50 researchers to focus on variously critical and creative re/positionings of the under-explored materialities of educational processes. This included how those materialities might intersect with, and productively inform, understandings of educational mobilities, spaces and places.

Co-convenor Johanna Waters began by welcoming Mike Donnelly (University of Bath), whose keynote address centred on spatial mapping as an elicitation tool, focusing on UK students’ ‘spatial imaginaries’ and perceptions of place.

Drawing on findings from the ESRC-funded programme that he is currently leading (‘Spatial and Social In/Mobilities’, 2016-2019), Mike explained what novel approaches to mapping can tell us about youth transitions and social im/mobilities - a thought-provoking study indeed when one considers the precarity of young people’s future trajectories and (trans)national mobilities in the wake of Brexit.

Find out more here:
http://www.bath.ac.uk/education/research/projects/geographies-higher-education/

“We are currently producing knowledge in a world of great social injustice” explained Cath Gristy, citing Jane Bennett’s (2010) writings. Cath’s words echoed key ideas arising from the keynote (including social in/justices and spatial im/mobility) that recurred throughout the day. Importantly, too, several papers focused on geographies of care entwined with geographies of education, with others stressing Rosi Braidotti’s emphasis on conceptual creativity as a way to enter into the “complexities and paradoxes of our times” (2013, p.54). This creative (re)thinking was especially evident in the wide-ranging and innovative methodologies shared during the day, and also in the discussions around diverse ‘materialities’ affecting education. These included: the school bus as ‘agentic assemblage’ (Cath Gristy); outdoor education spaces (Jo Hickman Dunne); communication devices used at conferences (Emily F. Henderson); academics’ work spaces (Mary Hamilton), and the materialisations, circulations and temporalities of data in secondary schools (Matt Finn). Each of these conceptualisations supported researchers’ related interests in mobilities and place, too; both
concerning how education is constituted in and through mobilities (from the smallest to the most extensive) and is also embedded in, and shapes different places.

Refreshingly, the one-day event provided opportunities for researchers across the social sciences to meet and reflect, generating spaces for new ways of thinking about knowledge creation; about the commonalities, challenges, and productive differences in our pursuit of materially oriented research.

The launch of Johanna Waters and Rachel Brookes book (Materialities and Mobilities in Education) served as an apt end to the conference, drawing together wide-ranging ways in which ideas around materialities and mobilities might fruitfully intersect; implicating, animating and inspiring new ways of thinking about geographies of education - and indeed, world-making. See the link to the book, below:


UPCOMING: RGS-IBG MIDTERM CONFERENCE

>> registration now open!

The next RGS-IBG Postgraduate Forum Mid-Term Conference will be held at Royal Holloway, University of London (Egham Campus) over the 18th-20th April 2018

- Conference fee: £60 (which includes wine reception and conference dinner)
- Full conference registration and 2x nights accommodation (incl. breakfast): £128

Hosted by PhD students in the Department of Geography, this event provides a great opportunity for postgraduate students to present their research and discuss new ideas in a relaxed, friendly and supportive environment. In true Mid-Term tradition, there will be keynote addresses from leading geographers at Royal Holloway, along with a host of innovative workshops aimed at improving your skills as a postgraduate.

Last years conference, held at University of Cardiff had over 80 presentations from 1st to 3rd Year PGRs, with themes ranging from Ethnography and Consumptions of Spaces to Identity and Memory to Resilience of the Global South. There were also a wide-range of workshops covering topics such as troubleshooting qualitative research to making impact with posters and the usual and poster competition. Whilst the Mid-Term Conference is aimed at both Physical and Human Geographers, the enthusiasm and interest for each individual research filled each room with discussions about their research and hints and tips on how to stay motivated.

The RGS-Mid Term also has a social side with plenty of refreshment breaks and the RGS Midterm Dinner event. This gave everyone the opportunity to share advice and tips for the thesis but also to meet new people and connect after the conference.

Key Dates:

- 19th January 2018: Call for Papers closes
THIS MONTH’S
TOP TIPS from:

...The Thesis Whisperer

(just like the Horse Whisperer, but with more pages)

How to Write 1000 words in a day

Make a daily PLAN

Step One: focus on one thing at a time - the secret about writing 1000 words in a day is to give yourself limited time to do this.

Step Two: the two hour rule - don’t spend more than two hours at a time at your desk on one thing

Step Three: start in the middle - start writing your thoughts and ideas on what you want or need to write this will plant the seed to build your chapter

Step Four: Write as fast as you can - thinking happens during the writing process. Write fast in 10-15 minutes blocks, break and then review which will help to plant other seeds.

Step Five: leave it to rest, then rewrite - Because you are writing without judgment, most of the words you generate in step four will need to be reviewed. The editing process will reveal 1000 words of substantive text. But take a break before you attempt this, or you won’t have the necessary perspective. Go and have a coffee with a friend, walk the dog, watch some TV – whatever takes you away from your desk for a couple of hours. Then come back – start sifting through and edit. Be strategic about this editing.

https://thesiswhisperer.com/
CALL FOR CARTOONS!

Our aim: to encourage discussion, reflexivity and creative connections between postgraduate/early career researchers working with children, young people and families.

Research communication/dissemination has long been a sticking point for children and youth geographers. Increasingly, research designs are embracing the creative turn evident in cultural geography more broadly. Playfulness and experimentation are key to extending the remit of our research group: to explore and communicate research creatively across the postgraduate community.

Interested? This ‘Call for Cartoons’ invites YOU to experiment with content, aesthetic, form and style; to work multimodally to collate, (re)create, and communicate YOUR research in other ways!

Details for entry: send us a single-side A4 or A3 page that communicates your research project in any way you like! Have fun - and feel good about it!

DEADLINE: 1ST JUNE, 2018

** WORKS SUBMITTED IN THE INTERIM WILL BE FEATURED ON GCYFRG WEBSITE, OUR TWITTER FEED, AND IN NEXT MONTH’S NEWSLETTER! **

£25 PRIZE FOR GRABS!

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