

Talk transfers – investigating and developing oral skills in a cross-curricular initiative

Julia Charles

Sir John Cass School, London

ABSTRACT

This study is an account of a project undertaken with a group of year nine students (13-14 year olds) in an inner city comprehensive school in 2004. The study focuses on the value of cross-curricular work, an area of personal interest and also an area that is currently under-researched, namely the value of 'talk' across the curriculum and as a preparation for the demands of further education.

'Talk' is considered to be a vital component in ensuring progress in the subject of English, yet many students are reluctant to participate in discussions particularly in speaking and listening activities. This fact motivated an investigation into how much 'talk' happens in other subjects. Working in another subject, an English teacher observed responses of a class doing oral group presentations.

This article provides background information, details the planning process and comments on the presentations. Reflections on the presentations include an analysis of students' comments from evaluation sheets completed after the presentations.

It documents how collaborating with a History teacher across strong curricular boundaries was a very positive experience. Such cross-curricular collaboration between teachers has been made more difficult by the strong boundaries between national curriculum subjects. This, it is argued here, is regrettable.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the value of talk for learning in a cross-curricular initiative. In this project, I collaborated with a colleague to bring together 'talk' in English and History. In working successfully together, my colleague and I promoted collaboration and cooperation between the students we were working with.

In schools individual teachers are usually located in departments on the basis of their specialisms. This, in turn, serves to organise staffing in the school's structure and teachers become identified with where in the school they work.

Allied to this is the way subject areas develop discreet schemes of work to meet the requirements of the specified curriculum and how subjects are blocked within the school timetable. Consequently, there are few opportunities for mapping and implementing cross-curricular themes or projects or for teachers to operate outside of their subject area. This is of concern to me because such limitations largely prevent teachers from working with colleagues from other departments and from exploring interests outside their subject area.

Subjects continue to operate autonomously whilst at the same time there are also concerns that students are not enjoying a rounded learning experience, i.e. that they don't have an opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills base. Business leaders complain that the current education system no longer teaches literacy, numeracy and communication skills. At the same time, employers' perceptions, and their experience in recruiting, have led to the conclusion that what is taught does not develop young people's potential and doesn't prepare them adequately for further study and the workplace. The CBI director, Sir Digby Jones, referred to this in the context of the publication of A level results by noting that "the education system is failing young people by leaving them ill-equipped" (Prince, 2005). He, and others, are not convinced by the calibre of students entering the workforce and that GCSEs and A levels, as they currently stand, actually equip students for their chosen occupations or career pathways.

Within the context of Continuing Professional Development, teachers do have opportunities to broaden their subject knowledge and acquire new skills. However, there are few opportunities for teachers who want to acquire additional knowledge by working in another subject area. Arguably, if this training was available there would be more flexibility and people's roles within schools would not be so rigidly enforced. We want students to be inquisitive, independent learners but as teachers we ourselves often operate within narrow parameters.

On a personal level, I am aware of how I position myself in different contexts as wife, mother, carer, teacher, student etc. I have found that having an understanding of subjectivity made it easier for me to adapt to another role. Subjectivity highlights the ways that "particular individuals are produced as subjects *differently* within a variety of discursive practices" (Walkerdine, 1990, p.5) and how "individuals are not produced as unitary subjects" (Walkerdine, 1990, p.3). I found moving into a different subject area a liberating experience. Being no longer positioned as the subject teacher provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my role in the classroom. I was able to focus on developing my role in this new context, and on making links between the two subjects.

Students sometimes struggle to locate themselves within disciplinary boundaries and they compartmentalise their learning. Therefore, they cannot draw upon, or they are not encouraged to make, links across the curriculum. Cross-curricular work can be so valuable because it offers opportunities to make links. Moreover, students also experience a different style of teaching with teachers from different disciplines working together.

It is important to highlight also that I had to carry my investigation in my non-contact time; this required determination and a huge commitment for the project to succeed.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Enquiry carried out by teachers in their own schools is a minority activity. Ruddock and Hopkins (1985, p. 16) reflect this in their observation that "what teachers most lack is confidence and experience in relating theory to design and in the conduct of research work". I can relate to this notion as I did not have anything to model my investigation on and I had to organise an arena where I could test out my ideas. My work is based largely

upon my own ideas and judgements and it is informed by a range of readings that I draw on to support my argument.

Currently there appears to be very little cross-curricular work going on in English schools. It is not discouraged in my school, but practical and logistical barriers often get in the way of any long-term initiatives and prevent them from becoming standard practice. I am interested in promoting cross-curricular or thematic initiatives and see real value for teachers working together. This collaborative process, in my view, can provide students with explicit links and connections across curriculum areas. I welcome any opportunity to promote talk and this was always going to feature in my project as I believe that good communication skills are "not so much the icing they are the raising agent" (Corkish, 1988, p. 45).

Good communication skills will inevitably enhance the learning experience and build confidence. I am convinced that using talk for learning does this as "it's a voice into pupils' writing, it helps them to develop and make sense of their reading, and it also does wonders for their self esteem, building confidence for the outside world" (quoted in Howe, 2003). A body of work has been developed from the National Oracy Project that has provided practical ideas to promote talk in the classroom. Alan Howe, who was the project officer with the National Oracy Project, writes about how a module called 'Thinking Together' aimed to promote discussion that was 'cognitive' rather than 'social'. He explains that "research tells that talk is vital to learning and pupils' social and intellectual growth" (Howe, 2003).

The main aim of my project was to investigate the transfer of knowledge and oral skills from one subject area to another. In addition, I wanted to incorporate my knowledge and understanding of Assessment for Learning into aspects of my project and practice. I had been involved in a borough-wide initiative to promote Assessment For Learning building upon the ideas developed by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam in 'Inside the Black Box' (1998) and 'Working Inside the Black Box' (2002). I wanted to extend my knowledge and apply what I had learnt in my teaching to another subject area. This would be reflected in my general approach, the materials I created and having the students evaluating their work.

When formulating ideas for my project, I decided to pursue my interest in cross-curricular work and I saw History as being an ideal subject to work in. There are similarities in the National Curriculum requirements of both subjects. The National Curriculum for English Level 6 states that pupils should have opportunities to listen to each other sharing ideas. They should also identify different layers of meaning and comment on their significance and effect, and give personal response to language structure and themes as well as summarise a range of information from different sources.

The requirements of the History National Curriculum Level 6 make it possible to see how links could be made between the two subjects: pupils should use their factual knowledge and understanding of the history of Britain. They should be taught to ask and answer questions, to examine and explain reasons, to evaluate sources, and to select and deploy relevant information.

In her work on language use in History, Thuraisingam draws on Brophy's ideas about how the teaching of History should not be "just transmission of knowledge but involve a process whereby students and teachers interact in order to analyse evidence...communicate their ideas and understand others' viewpoints" (Brophy (1996) in Thuraisingam,(2001)).

Whilst I made talk for learning the focus of my cross-curricular work, it is clear that what Brophy said would in itself be a justification for more oral work to be done in History. More connections between the two subjects would also be useful especially when students are dealing with fact and fiction. The reading component in the English SATs has become mostly factually based and students are being tested on their ability to select and evaluate material. If the source material from History was also used in English lessons, this would aid with development of evaluative skills. The use of the material could be made explicit to the students, and would serve to demonstrate the link between the two subjects. Studying history involves students having to use their imagination and to empathise with particular individuals. These skills are also applied to the study of works of literature. In addition, it is useful for students to see how events often inform what authors write about and also to consider the way that actual events have been retold. This provides a further point of connection between the two subjects.

In teaching English I try to incorporate and highlight social, cultural and historical links that relate to the texts that I am teaching. Much of this is done through discussion as it helps students to come to some kind of common definition or interpretation of context. However, this approach can only have a limited impact if it is not applied across the curriculum, hence my interest in working outside my subject specialism. Interestingly, Thuraisingam refers to Booth's work and the consideration of how historical thought did involve imagination and empathy, and this requires abstract thinking. Booth looked at the stage that students could think 'adductively' and he believed that "discursive, open ended discussions in class may allow students to have a better understanding of History" (Booth (1983) in Thuraisingam(2001) Therefore, if students are encouraged to discuss and assess evidence in a critical way, they will develop historical thinking processes.

In my school I was fortunate to have a colleague in the History department interested in my ideas and enthusiastic about cross-curricular initiatives. He wanted to participate in my project and suggested working with his year nine class. This collaboration allowed my ideas to evolve in a comfortable environment where I was able to observe him teach and make notes to refer to later.

At the start of the project I was initially positioned as a learner; my role in the classroom evolved as the project continued. However, throughout my participation in the History lessons I always considered that I was learning and this perspective proved very useful to me when I planned activities or made contributions to the lessons. Whilst observing the teacher and students in a number of lessons I familiarised myself with the scheme of work being taught. Gradually I participated in lessons working with individual students and groups of students. The History teacher slowly involved me in the lessons, as he wanted to build some elements of peer teaching. I also became more familiar with the source material the students were using.

Once the students were used to my participation in their lessons I explained to them the basis of my project and what I planned to do. They were keen to participate and they consented to the use of data from their evaluation sheets and their comments in this article. In recognition of this I gave them certificates to put in their Record of Achievement folders. I continued to work with the class for most of the remainder of the school year. When I finished working with the class I interviewed my teaching partner and quote directly from the interview, with his consent.

The project drew on oral group presentations with each group preparing an accompanying leaflet as the primary form of data as well as a PowerPoint presentation.

In the introduction I refer to being aware and comfortable that I operate across different subject positions. The different positions, however, sometimes lead to tensions, particularly when operating within a restricted and narrow curriculum. At times I want to go outside the boundaries and I have lots of ideas about doing this whilst realising that the structures in school are not designed in a way for me to explore them. For example, I teach ‘Mean to be Free’, a play about Harriet Tubman and her involvement in helping slaves to escape to Canada. If this play were used at the same time as students were being taught about slavery in History it would be a more meaningful learning experience for students in both subjects. Collaboration between teachers can be stimulating:

Collaboration involves supplanting the traditional norms of isolation and autonomy, creating opportunities for interaction among educators (Dorsh, 1998, p.2).

Innovative resources can be the outcome of collaboration. These can enable students to see the connections between historical events and works of fiction. If students were aware of this at an earlier stage, they would have less difficulty when studying A level Literature in recognising the social, cultural and historical contexts of the texts studied and be better equipped to meet the assessment objectives. More and more I find myself searching for information to provide the context for the texts we are studying. The decision to work with a History teacher for this project gave me a wider overview and ideas for resources that I could develop and relate to texts studied in English.

In English lessons I promote talk and encourage students to see that talk is for learning and it can, as the principles behind assessment for learning have shown me, be used to assess knowledge and understanding. With this in mind it was inevitable that I would focus on oral responses in my initial observations in History lessons. The idea of presentations evolved out of an initial conversation with the class teacher, which he later referred to when I interviewed him: *I had always wanted to include an opportunity for pupils to teach their peers (History teacher, June 2004).*

We discussed the concept of focussing more on student-centred learning and how, in general, talk helps to make thinking clearer and aids a student’s ability to recall events. My interest in talk for learning led to us to conclude that presentations provided a collaborative activity and an opportunity for students to talk and learn in their peer groups. In addition, they would be responsible for the outcome of their learning as the decision making about, the content of their presentations, how they would organise the presentation and create the

leaflet were all entrusted to the student group. More importantly, for us as teachers, the presentations were an inclusive activity and provided the students with an opportunity to rehearse and use the language conventions required for formal presentations. We decided that the presentations should tie in with the end of what was then the current topic. The class would also have their end of unit test, thereby not affecting the departmental summative assessment procedure.

As teachers collaborating we shared a common vision and were sufficiently motivated to ensure that what we planned had a successful outcome. Furthermore it was *the ability to be flexible in approach and adapt to events at short notice also helped us* (History teacher, June 2004).

On reflection, I recognise just how much commitment was required by the class teacher. He had to adapt his approach to the History curriculum as we were constructing an activity not previously considered. I was freed from the constraints of my subject to do my project but my partner still had the responsibility of ensuring the coverage of the scheme of work in the History curriculum. Therefore, this kind of collaborative project required a colleague who was realistic, unselfish but also determined to see that what we envisaged would work. I am completely indebted to him for his flexibility, sense of humour and practical suggestions about the time frame required in order for the students to prepare and give the presentations.

THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

At this point I want to reflect upon and outline my thinking about the value of presentations as a vehicle for learning and to comment on my initial observations in the History class. These observations suggested to me that students were safe with source material they had been using which gave them background of, and particular people's contributions to, the Civil Rights movement. The students were looking through the source material for information and someone in the group would quickly find what was required so the others would then know where to look to formulate their answer. As I was often in the position of a learner looking through the material in class with the students, I was soon able to identify the students who would be first to find the information required and how there is a tendency to rely upon them to do this.

This may seem to be a rather negative interpretation of events but I so often observed the same students being able to deal more proficiently with the information presented to them. Moreover, being positioned as a learner myself, I was aware that I would be unlikely to contribute if I could not find something quickly enough or if I was not an able reader. I also thought there was certain passivity about working with source material that does not encourage debate. This approach seemed to block students from formulating their own opinions about the material they are working with. Factual evidence should be thought of more in terms of a version of events or 'stories of history' and the material needs evaluating with consideration given to reliability and bias. There is not always a chance for students to explore their ideas through talk to enable them to reflect on their own perspectives and

interpretations. Allied to this is the way that students are encouraged to exclude the 1st person in their written work and this does not just happen in History.

It is useful at this point to consider the work of Lillis who carried out research with a group of students into their experience of writing at university. This is a telling comment from one of her students: “I also feel really frustrated at the way ‘they’ want me to write...most tutors will not allow the use of ‘I’ ... the ‘I’ is really powerful because you feel a part of it. When you are not allowed to use ‘I’, you feel like an outsider.” (Lillis and Ramsey, 1997, p.18)

Consequently, when students are asked for their opinions in other subjects such as English, they are reticent to contribute and offer an opinion in both oral and written work. I have already suggested that students should be better prepared to be able to deal with facts and opinions. In my experience in the English classroom students have difficulty in recognising facts and opinions and such ability is tested in the GCSE English Language examination. Talk and written response in the 1st person is essential for this evaluative process and this should not be limited to taking place in English lessons. Interestingly, at the time of me doing this project my Head of Department prepared a report on the Year 11 mock exams. She found the evaluation of the material provided in the exam and the personal response to it to be by far the weakest part of the students’ exam answers. We discussed how students had so few opportunities to develop and practise these skills across the curriculum. This conversation also vindicated my project and confirmed my view that the development of some skills could be generic and not subject specific. This contributed to the decision to work in another curriculum area feeling that as teachers we may have to look outside our subject area both for reaffirmation and ideas about how best to meet the needs of our students. We have to “cast around for ways of making sense of things as we address the situated problems of our practice” (Cobb, 1999, p.48).

Looking outside our subject area can sometimes provide more in depth understanding of issues relating to what we teach and how our students learn. I also reflected upon how the structures of the National Curriculum can militate against many students as they are not always being encouraged to take a position of their own and in some ways are being kept outside of their own learning.

Allied to this is the desire I have that teachers should not always be confined and defined in terms of their subject area. As I stated earlier, connections can be made in curriculum areas and some things we teach in our subject areas can actually inform and enhance what is taught in another. However, many teachers will resist the implementation of these ideas as it is clear that

academic disciplines possess a ‘community of discourse’... a set of procedures...a tradition of work in the form of knowledge and work within respected modes or paradigms (King and Brown, in McKernan, 1996).

In my experience many people feel most comfortable in their area of expertise and do not readily welcome input from elsewhere nor do they want to work outside their area of expertise. This situation is unlikely to change in a climate when teachers are being judged

by results and this is the currency that is increasingly being used to determine salaries with the result that opportunities to diversify or set up cross-curricular initiatives are less likely to occur.

COLLABORATIVE TALK – STUDENTS PREPARING THEIR PRESENTATIONS

In the following I am going to focus on the organisation and preparation of the students' presentations. The title given to the groups for the presentations was 'Have black Americans achieved equality?' The class had been studying the Civil Rights movement and the presentations could be directly related to work the students had been doing in class. My presence in many of the lessons enabled me to assist the class teacher to produce a pack of information to give to the groups. They also received a disc to save and organise their material in preparation for the PowerPoint presentations. The groups were also asked to produce a small leaflet to accompany their presentations. Comments from the students in the evaluation process refer to how they liked the way the information material was presented in an organised, professional way. We felt that the students responded accordingly by producing professional presentations. This shows the value of modelling learning strategies for students. We also produced our own PowerPoint presentation to provide students with guidance and to use in the feedback session.

I specified that I would like the students to be in mixed ability/mixed gender groups to do the presentations as my observations had revealed that students sat in friendship pairs and that there was a small group of students who tended to dominate the question and answer sessions. I wanted to see if a change in the dynamics of the class would affect the response and the level of participation. The groups were organised by the class teacher as he knew the students. The students were not that happy with the groupings, particularly the mixed gender element to the groups.

In our school there are more boys than girls and students are reluctant to work in mixed groups because there cannot be even numbers. However, any objections about the groupings were soon tempered by the nature of the task and the prospect of working away from the classroom. Research time was allocated to the groups and materials prepared by the class teacher and myself were then given to them to aid their research. We provided a collection of mini biographies of prominent black Americans, including politicians, academics, sport stars and figures from film and television, representing men and women. The students were also given a number of pictures to help them with the visual elements of their PowerPoint slides along with relevant websites. The material we provided was to aid the students in their groups with the research and organisation of their presentations. They were free to base their presentations on any of the material provided or to feature other prominent figures found through further research.

In the process of preparing the presentations the students worked remarkably well in these 'imposed' groups. I also think that being out of the classroom helped in this respect. I observed the students cooperating as tasks were allocated within the group without teacher intervention and students actually becoming the teacher in the group. Adult guidance was necessary but the knowledge of the topic allocated to the class was 'reinvented' in the

groups as they built upon, and added to, their previous knowledge. I recalled an earlier conversation with my partner teacher (referred to earlier) when he spoke about students teaching each other. We were witnessing this taking place as the students were preparing their presentations. We had carefully worked out a time frame for the activity, mindful of not taking too much time away from the delivery of the scheduled schemes of work. The students knew this and responded accordingly; to meet the deadline for the presentations some worked in their lunchtime and after school.

THE PRESENTATIONS – A REVELATION: STUDENTS SPEAKING OUT!

The presentations took place in the afternoon of a particularly difficult day at school. I was quite nervous about what the students would do having seen only parts of the presentations. The students had taken responsibility for their work and I had not seen any final products. The presentations were a revelation in the way that the students had clearly become so involved in the process they were motivated to produce high quality PowerPoint presentations with a real awareness of audience. Of particular interest was the way that students who did not normally answer in class were animated, involved and took part, speaking confidently about what the group had decided. It was clear that having been given a different style of working had largely led to this very positive response. Students had taken charge and directed proceedings with the teachers being available in an advisory rather than supervisory role. More importantly, the students had some investment in what the outcome would be and they did not want their presentation to look bad in front of the other groups. I found this aspect interesting. As the presentations were not being marked or graded I had not accounted for the groups becoming so competitive. Perhaps they also found the sense of ownership motivating.

The groupings were an important factor in the success of the presentations. The students were not in a comfort zone of being with their friends. This meant they had to adopt strategies to make the dynamics of the group work and it had been fascinating watching them do this: *'some pupils put more effort into the preparation than others, however the delivery was shared equally'* (History teacher, June 2004).

Although the presentations had the same title they still had lots of variety in them. The groups had carefully selected who and what to feature in their presentations. They had divided up the way they would discuss their findings, paying attention to the language they used to make their points. There was a lot of energy in the room and I was encouraged by what I saw and was pleased that my involvement had enabled such a good display. The class teacher was delighted with what he had seen and said that it had been a very liberating experience for the class, explaining: *'there were particular highlights such as Halima speaking out in class for the first time'* (History teacher, June 2004).

It had been a worthwhile teaching experience not only in our collaboration but also in the way it was evident that learning had been embedded. This was demonstrated in the students' selection and use of material and proved their learning had gone beyond what they had been taught in the classroom.

Whilst I was happy with the presentations, I needed to know what the students thought about their experience, and more importantly, what they thought they had learnt from preparing for and participating in their presentations. I prepared evaluation sheets for the students to complete after the presentations and some of their comments are referred in the next section of this article.

STUDENT COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

As this was an experimental situation, marking or grading the presentations was not a consideration. However, I did build in aspects of my understanding of Assessment for Learning by having an evaluation exercise at the end of the presentations. We also prepared a presentation to use a model. Then, as teachers, we evaluated what we had learnt from the process of working together.

The self-assessment that I incorporated into the presentations was formative in nature as I wanted the students to evaluate their contributions and to consider what they had learnt: *Developing reflective habits of mind is an essential condition for learning* (Zessales and Gardner, 1991, in Black, 1999, p. 176).

I regularly use self-assessment and pupil evaluation in my subject, English, and transferred this approach to my work in History. The comments students made show that they are aware of the skills they developed and used in preparing for and delivering the presentations.

'It helped me in presenting my work and in being more confident.'

'You have more input into you lessons.'

'I have learnt more about civil rights from doing this presentation.'

'It will help will all aspects of work not just History.'

Reflecting on how the presentations came about, I am very aware that the process of learning was wider than a teacher passing on knowledge to the class. I was in an unusual position as learner with the class, as a teacher learning with another teacher and also as a subject teacher with subject specific knowledge. I also had ideas about the transfer of knowledge. Doing this project confirms my belief that skills acquired can be transferred elsewhere, and that when students are actively involved in their learning this is a more meaningful experience. This was evident in the way the students organised the tasks and gave their presentations. Comments from the students back this up:

'You can teach other people about a topic and get the message across better'.

'I enjoyed writing and sorting out the introduction and in working with others.'

'We split our group in two sharing the jobs we were best at. Some did the leaflet and showed the others. Others did the PowerPoint and then showed the others how to do the slides.'

The students were very aware of the process they went through and that it was not teacher-led and that they were not being judged or tested. Maybe they were also motivated by using

PowerPoint for their presentations, connecting this with being a professional thing to do and these comments reflect this view.

*‘Being able to use a smart-board to present my work in a professional way’
‘It helps you with speaking skills, how you organise yourself and in being more professional’*

Paul Black’s ideas of formative assessment inform a great deal of my thinking in how teachers need to guide learning and how feedback and self-assessment can encourage and promote progress. I wanted the students to think about and evaluate what they had learnt from the experience of working in this way. I had been clear that the presentations would not be marked or graded. I do not feel that this approach in any way de-motivated the students. The resulting presentations were for me evidence of learning and I agree with Black (1999, p. 125):

for effective learning it makes a difference if students believe that effort is more important than ability, that mistakes are an inevitable part of learning, and they have control over their own learning.

These students’ comments are evidence that effective learning had taken place.

*‘I was nervous speaking in front of the class in case I made a mistake. But this tells me I can do it again in the future.’
‘It helped me to confront others with my work and also to work with others getting things right.’*

As teachers, we fed back to the students about the presentations but only after the evaluation forms were completed. We did not want to influence their responses. The two key areas we found that needed to be developed were summarising skills, and the actual way students used text on the PowerPoint slides. The comments made on the evaluation forms also refer to this: *‘we needed to shorten it there was too much for people to read.’*

We modelled a short presentation demonstrating how to make points concisely, and we used a variety of ways to present text on PowerPoint slides. I found this whole class feedback valuable for the students as they were then keen to do other presentations taking the ideas of others on board:

the direct effect of particular feedback on a pupil’s learning can be enhanced by the indirect effect on pupil’s attitudes, self-concept and motivation. (Black, 1999, p.126).

Encouraging the students to take control of their work, evaluate it and consider what they had learnt was a very valuable experience for students and teachers alike.

LIFE IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM AFTER THE PRESENTATIONS

The most surprising occurrence was the change in relationship I had with the students in the class. They were never hostile to me; I was after all a member of the teaching staff, albeit not a *History* teacher. It was almost as if the success of the presentations validated my presence in the class and they responded to me in a way that was not dissimilar to how they interacted with their regular teacher. I also realised what an advantage it was not having previously taught any members of the class. The relationship with the class was built upon the work we were doing across disciplines without any previous knowledge of the students.

After the presentations it was also very noticeable that as a class they spoke more in lessons. The previously quiet students were answering more questions and they did not always want to work in their friendship groups. This was very encouraging to see. The use of collaborative talk had not only been a way of facilitating a task and embedding learning, but it also was a liberating experience for a number of the students. The experience of doing the presentations had left them more confident in their ability to express themselves. The presentations were set up on the basis of group interaction and co-operation; they were a tool to support talk for learning and had encouraged dialogue and cooperation. The students saw relevance in what they were doing, and how it would help them in other aspects of their work at school and for what they did in the future. The student evaluations show that the class enjoyed doing the presentations.

CONCLUSION

I enjoyed working with the class and learnt a lot from the students and their teacher. I worked with them until near the end of the academic year, and during this time I planned and taught some lessons in their next unit of work. This is something I had not envisaged or planned for when I started the project.

When the presentations were set up I thought carefully of how to promote ‘talk’ and how valuable I believed it to be in the learning process. Talk can be an empowering experience, which enables students to share what they know and understand. This process can and should be built upon across the curriculum. I also reflected upon participating in cross-curricular teaching and how it requires time: *‘patience, tolerance and professional respect’* (History teacher, June 2004).

However, it provides opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, to see different points of view and employ new techniques and strategies.

‘Being involved in the ... project was an enjoyable one for me and beneficial for the students...the area of the project I value most was your knowledge and enthusiasm and your willingness to share ideas with me that improved my teaching’ (History teacher, 2004).

Furthermore, as a result of this project, the History department are seriously considering incorporating the presentations into their end of unit assessment. Senior management have

also looked favourably on the successful outcome of this cross-curricular project, and it is referred to in the school developmental plan.

I feel that the experience of doing this project helped me to see where my understanding of subjectivity overlaps with my identity as a teacher. I am comfortable having stepped outside the confines of my subject area and *I* am now more convinced of the value of collaborative teaching and would like to do a similar project in the future.

The students' cooperation with me was a crucial factor to the success of this project. I feel it is important to use a comment from one of them in this conclusion as it does give me the impetus to continue with teacher-enquiry: *'It helps us with independent learning and to understand in our own way not just from a boring textbook!'*

The project I carried out had a very positive outcome for all involved in it. Reflecting now in this article on the project and the factors that led to its success, I hope will inspire other teachers to attempt similar projects.

POSTSCRIPT

Reviewing this article I am reminded of the enthusiasm I had when I was working with the class and their teacher. However, I have had to recognise that despite interest shown in my work, good ideas and successful initiatives are not always followed through. At present the school is focussing on raising achievement in Maths and English and on target setting; therefore, mapping cross-curricular work is not a priority at present.

Furthermore the teacher I worked with is a member of the Senior Management Team and no longer teaching so we couldn't continue the peer teaching we had successfully established. This is disappointing as we had considered developing other initiatives to try in the future. However, he is encouraging other teachers to employ some of the strategies we employed in working together on the project.

In my opinion, teaching should not be a mechanical process geared towards meeting ever increasing numbers of targets. Instead, it should be more about cooperation, creativity and this process can be further enriched by the efforts being a collaborative process. Enabling teachers to be involved in cross-curricular teaching, collaboration and research is a challenge for schools in this current climate but teachers should not be discouraged from promoting diversity as instrument for change in education.

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Correspondence

Julia Charles, Sir John Cass School, London. sirjohncass@hotmail.co.uk