

Cross-Curricular learning led by the humanities

— Chris Rowley

The Cambridge review of Primary Curriculum (Alexander 2009) suggests a 'domain' of Time and Place. The Rose Report (DfCFS 2009) recommends 'human, social and environmental understanding' as an area of learning in the new 2011 curriculum. Although Rose has omitted this from his final report it is clear that the humanities will need to look closely at the models of subject linking that they use. Here I draw upon work done with schools in editing 'Cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning' (Rowley & Cooper 2009) to suggest that there are a variety of approaches, that all of these have a values component, and that this component is fundamentally connected to the type of enquiry approach that we adopt. Since the humanities are an ideal starting point for many cross-curricular themes it would be wise for us to begin a cross-subject debate on those enquiry approaches.

Dewey believed that there is no benefit in creating a false opposition between 'subjects' and 'child' as a focus for curriculum. They are mutually interdependent in an educational sense. Furthermore Dewey sees 'knowing' and 'valuing' as part of a whole, which needs to be infused through our experiences. So we need to search for examples of robust links between subjects; links which take account of the discrete thinking processes at the heart of different subjects and relate them through children's experiences. Environmental Education is perfect for cross-curricularity.

Discussions with teachers at Pennington School in Cumbria as they began the process of moving back into whole school

cross-curricular planning identified a number of reflections which help to clarify the range of reasons that might be used for such a move. Pennington planned its cross-curricular work by starting from the main subject objectives and then identifying themes which would achieve those.

'Many of the children find visualisation hard; art often helps visualising the meanings found in text' (Bryan Singleton, Year 6 teacher). As an example Bryan planned 5 weeks work using Tennyson's poem 'Lady of Shallott' in which art helped keep the children's interest throughout the period. He found that the different ways of seeing the world used by different subjects made the theme more inclusive, enabling children to respond to different types of text.

Neil Davies, also a teacher at Pennington found that the foundation subjects often offered ways into the other subjects and that time was freed up by the cross-curricular planning that made it possible to study subjects in more depth rather than less. His example of using the Egyptians as a history theme led into trigonometry, ICT and language work.

Clearly cross-curricular planning raises real issues for many teachers, particularly in finding a balance between teacher-led perceptions of how subjects link and others' understanding of those links. On the one hand there has to be individual appraisal and choice based on the teacher's professional judgement, on the other hand the school itself needs to have whole school policies that enable long term tracking and assessment for learning.

Figure 1 Examples in Cooper and Rowley (2009) which demonstrate different approaches to cross-curricular learning which is led by history and / geography.

Using the local area as a familiar location with a focus on using art to enable children to see the unfamiliar in their area.	Focus on developing historical enquiry and <i>other subjects to explore the possible thoughts and feelings of people in the past</i>
Using a <i>visit to an unfamiliar location</i> and the imperative of a final presentation using ICT as the integrating force	Long term and partnership approaches and <i>complex concepts</i> on the environment
Using historical research into an individual who challenges our stereotypes to <i>drive key questions for different subjects</i> after a museum sleepover.	<i>Making connections</i> between ways of seeing the world as a way of developing "international mindedness"
	<i>Using dialogue as a way of linking subjects.</i> Philosophy for Children, in which good reasoning is celebrated over content, is used and leads to cross-curricular learning.



The process dimension in cross-curricular enquiry. How do we decide on the best material.

Figure 1 (on page 15) illustrates the range of approaches used in developing cross-curricular work in Rowley and Cooper 2009, in which history and geography form the main stimulus. In each case study a different stimulus is used in order to develop an enquiry in which other subjects play an important role in developing the skills and understanding necessary to develop values emerging in the theme.

Pike and Selby (2000) identified four dimensions to the curriculum, building on their previous work going back to 1987. They spoke of the need for four components to any future curriculum.

1. A Spatial dimension
2. A Temporal dimension
3. An Issues dimension and
4. A Process dimension

Dimensions 1 to 3 clearly relate closely to the knowledge embedded in History and Geography, They defined the fourth dimension as the 'inner dimension' Hicks (2007) has further developed this dimension and defined it as including values. The process dimension is fundamentally associated with the processes of enquiry that are embedded in the humanities and which bring a number of special

characteristics to the process of learning. Values Education is an inherent part of that enquiry process.

References

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