

LEARNING

Collaborating with schools: challenges and opportunities for oral historians

by Andy Clark

Abstract: Collaboration with schools represents an important way to engage young learners with the practical uses of oral testimony. This article considers the challenges and opportunities for oral historians considering such collaborative work, based on the experience of the Scottish Oral History Centre in working with Springburn Academy. It is suggested that, despite challenges, an oral history project can increase the confidence and attainment of the pupils involved, outlining the practical aspects of a project which appeared to facilitate these positive outcomes, aiming to promote dialogue across the oral history community.

Key words: school oral history; attainment; collaboration; aspiration; Glasgow

This article emerged from the 2014 Oral History Society Conference, during which there was a thoroughly absorbing panel on oral history in schools. Over the course of three presentations and the resulting discussion, it was apparent that there is a substantial level of interest within the oral history community in engaging with the primary and secondary education sector. These discussions continued throughout the remainder of the conference, with a consensus emerging on the need for researchers to increase dialogue to maximise the impact of school-based oral history projects for everyone involved. This article seeks to continue the conversation by outlining my experience of collaborating with school pupils and reflecting on the challenges and benefits of working on this type of research project. This extra-curricular project involved the Scottish Oral History Centre and Springburn Academy, a secondary school in Glasgow, as part of the Models of University-School Engagement

(MUSE) project being undertaken at the University of Strathclyde. My aim here is to provide a reflective analysis of the project, considering the aspects which worked well and the challenges presented in collaborating with a school.

The article begins with an overview of MUSE and outlines the characteristics of Springburn Academy, before discussing the development of the project as conducted with the pupils. I suggest that in order to allow pupils to conduct original research to the best of their ability, it is necessary to begin with a broad discussion of the materials available to researchers, assuming no prior knowledge, before attempting to narrow the focus to the project being undertaken and the uses of oral testimony. Based on this experience I then outline the challenges of collaborating with a secondary school, with the aim of providing advice for researchers considering a school-based project and minimising any issues that may arise. I then assess the substantial



The logo of Springburn Academy. Photo: A Clark.

North British Locomotive, Springburn.



The Scottish Oral History Centre, based at Strathclyde University, is working with Springburn Academy on a project on North British Locomotive's Springburn plant.

We are looking to interview those who worked there at this time and would greatly appreciate any assistance. Participants may remain anonymous if they wish and we will schedule interviews to your convenience and comfort.

If you would like to be involved, please contact Andrew Clark on 0141 548 3975 or andrew.clark@strath.ac.uk



This poster was designed by myself and the pupils to display in the local community to recruit interviewees.

positive impact that such collaboration can have, particularly for the school pupils, as it was noted in this project that their confidence visibly increased and there were indicators of improved attainment through their participation. The article ends with a discussion of some aspects of the running of this project which I feel contributed to positive outcomes for the pupils involved. I hope that this work with researchers considering collaboration with schools will facilitate the exchange of ideas, ensure that such projects have an impact on community-based oral history research and fully benefit the individuals and institutions involved.

Project MUSE and Springburn Academy

The Models of University-School Engagement (MUSE) project is an initiative funded by Research Councils UK to promote collaboration between researchers and school pupils involving twelve universities across the UK; the University of Strathclyde is the sole participating Scottish higher education institution. The project seeks to facilitate collaboration between school pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds and academic researchers, with the aims of demonstrating the practical implications of research and raising the aspirations of pupils who may previously have given little thought to university as a post-secondary school option. It also aims to demystify university for school pupils and to demonstrate that higher education is more than a collection of buildings located – physically and metaphorically – outside their

communities. The University of Strathclyde initiative involves three partner schools within the jurisdiction of Glasgow City Council: Bellahouston Academy; Knightswood Secondary; and Springburn Academy, with over 170 school students involved in a range of projects from disciplines including architecture, engineering and creative art. The Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC) agreed to lead a project with Springburn Academy, aiming to involve an SOHC staff member, a postgraduate student and an undergraduate student participating in the honours-level course 'Community Placement in Oral History'. SOHC's Director, Professor Arthur McIvor, asked if I would lead the project on beginning my doctoral studies in September 2013 and James Owens was chosen as the undergraduate to assist during the first semester. SOHC's aims were to further its involvement in community-based oral history projects, to generate interest in oral history among young people and to allow an undergraduate to work in a school as part of the requirements for the Community Placement course.

It was agreed James and I would visit the school and meet with S4 pupils each Friday during last period (a core class such as Religious Education or PE for which pupils will not sit exams) and remain for an hour after the end of the normal school day. Scottish S4 is the equivalent of Year Eleven in England and Wales, with pupils aged between fifteen and sixteen. It is at the end of S4 that pupils sit their first Scottish Qualification Authority examinations. Fourteen pupils (thirteen girls and one boy) volunteered to take part, the distribution offering an interesting insight into differences in gender-based attitudes to participation in extra-curricular activities at this stage in their education. The group's members were from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds so that they – and their families – had developed varied links with both Springburn Academy and the wider city.

Springburn Academy is a non-denominational secondary school with over 1,000 pupils. It is located in the UK parliamentary constituency of Glasgow North East, which with 43 per cent of children living in poverty households, has the third-highest rate of child poverty in the UK.¹ The social deprivation of the area is reflected in the school, with 40 per cent of pupils entitled to free school meals in 2012-2013 compared with a Glasgow average of 27.3 per cent and a Scottish average of 15.5 per cent.² The destination of leavers in 2011-2012 demonstrates that a significantly smaller proportion of pupils from Springburn go to university when compared with Scottish averages, at 21 per cent and 36 per cent respectively.³

Despite the challenges presented by the socio-economic context in which the school operates, Springburn Academy has improved its performance continuously since 2005 and participated in a range of initiatives similar to MUSE, such as the Glasgow Caledonian University Advanced Higher Hub, which invites pupils into the university to work towards their sixth



A selection of the pupils involved working on draft research posters.

year Advanced Higher studies awards (the highest attainable for school pupils in Scotland). Under the direction of head teacher Liz Ervine, exam results have continuously improved and general educational attainment is increasing throughout the school. As well as the SOHC project, Springburn was involved in a MUSE project with the Department of Architecture, further highlighting the ambition of the school to engage with university-led initiatives. My motivation for participating in the project was partly the enjoyment of working with young people, but primarily a desire to demonstrate to school pupils from a deprived area – similar to my hometown of Greenock – the importance of their community history, the significance of the lived experience and the practical application of this research, encouraging them to consider higher education as an option after leaving secondary school.

The Springburn locomotive works project

Professor McIvor and I developed a project focusing on the decline of locomotive production in Springburn throughout the later twentieth century, based in our shared research interests in the field of deindustrialisation and its long-term impacts on those communities left behind by the relocation of capital. The project had no set aims and objectives – a point discussed further below – but sought to give pupils practical experience of conducting original research in order to improve their own analytical skills. We took the approach ‘research for research’s sake’, the decline of the locomotive works providing us with a significant local historical development around which we could develop research skills, the gathering of historical evidence and the contribution of oral testimonies.

During the first five weeks of the project we considered types of documentary sources available to social science researchers, with a particular focus on newspapers. We encouraged pupils to think critically about information presented to them through the media. Whilst this is a simple concept for students in further education, such ideas and concepts are less familiar to those in secondary school. We used contemporary examples which the pupils could engage with, such as front page headlines from the *Daily Mail* and celebrity scandal stories from the *Sun* and other tabloids and, with each example, we asked them to analyse the content of the news stories and critically examine why they were presented in the way they were. This stripping back of the research process was crucial in the development of pupils’ research skills, providing a practical opportunity to think in a critically reflective way when analysing sources. Many had only minimal experience of this in their own school work. Using contemporary examples also allowed the group to relate this critical thought to subjects which they have a good understanding of through daily interactions with the media.

By the fourth week the pupils demonstrated an excellent awareness of media spin and the bias of other historical documentary sources – including archived diaries and letters – as we encouraged them to consider missing narratives. A productive technique was to repeatedly ask questions in different ways utilising various examples, which ensured that they began to recognise the different uses of documentary materials without becoming bored with repetition. We purposely avoided extensive discussions of oral history until the fifth week of the project, once the pupils had demonstrated a sound grasp of documentary-based research and its possible limitations.

“It was a healthy and wealthy place”: An Oral History of the Springburn Locomotive Industry

Introduction

The impact of the decline of the locomotive industry that once dominated Springburn is an interesting area of research when considering social and economic changes in later 20th century Scotland. S4 pupils of Springburn Academy have worked with the Scottish Oral History Centre to design and conduct an original research project that examines this. We have met for two hours every week in school and have thought about research planning, source analysis, collecting primary data and presenting our work.

Springburn and the Locomotive Works

All of our interviewees worked in one of the main locomotive works in Springburn: North British Loco, Caledonian Railway and Cowlairs. They described how busy the area was when the working day was finished, with the streets filled with men leaving the works. They all enjoyed their work in the railway, although it could be very dangerous. They recalled instances of people being badly injured and even killed whilst at work. What emerged through the interviews was the sense of identity that these respondents – and the community of Springburn – had with the locomotive works. As one respondent told us, “the railway was Springburn”.



Methods

We first learned about the different sources that are used by historians doing research. We thought about newspapers, diaries, letters and other written documents. Whilst these are useful, it is important to be aware of bias and the agenda of the authors. We also thought about how representative these sources are and discovered that, often, the voices of marginalised groups – such as workers or ethnic minorities – are not represented. For example, we could not find a lot of information about what it was like working in Springburn from these sources. We then thought about oral history and were given training on interviewing, ethics, and transcribing by the SOHC. We recruited a cohort of five interviewees and formulated a questionnaire that would give us the recollections that we sought for our research.

Decline and Impact

The decline of the locomotive industry led to the decline of Springburn, with high unemployment and social problems. The extent of feeling about this was demonstrated clearly by our interviewees. Words such as ‘tragic’ and ‘killed’ were used to describe the impact of locomotive decline. These reflections are interesting and, whilst they could have been overly romanticising the past to a degree, offer important insights into the ways in which communities reflect on the impact of socio-economic change. It taught us how significantly people have identified with their employment and the ways that this still impacts on their views and perceptions. It also taught us that Springburn was once a very successful area and that its rise and decline was closely related to the success and failure of the locomotive industry, something that we did not realise before participating in this project.



Project MUSE: Springburn Academy and the Scottish Oral History Centre

Our first discussion of oral methods was deliberately vague and informal, pulling together what had been discussed in the previous weeks to consider the role of testimony in the research process. Thus the pupils engaged in a more critical manner than would have been possible before our initial research discussions.

Following this, we spent two weeks discussing the history of Glasgow and Springburn from the industrial revolution to the present, focusing on social and economic developments. Working in groups, the pupils explored critically how different sources enabled them to recognise links between broader economic developments and changes in Springburn society. When we highlighted the significance of locomotive production to the growth of Springburn and its subsequent decline, the pupils quickly recognised the limitations of using documentary sources in understanding the social aspects of deindustrialisation, a key methodological aim of the project at the outset. Only at this point did we discuss oral history methods as the pupils now had a better critical awareness of different research approaches and the range of materials available. It was crucial that the pupils were equipped with this knowledge before undertaking their own oral history project as this meant that they were able to see the benefits of testimony in their research clearly and to engage more thoughtfully with oral history. The pupils developed their own oral history skills by working selectively with the SOHC's training materials. We spent less time focusing on such technical and legal aspects as recording, storage and copyright, assuming that this group's members were more interested in the actual interviewing process. Whilst ensuring that they were aware of these aspects, it was of little use to expose them to the ins and outs of copyright clearance as the project leaders would make sure that all proper procedures were followed as per SOHC instructions and guidelines.

Working in smaller groups was, again, a useful way to allow the pupils to engage with the interview process. We provided them with a range of possible oral history topics, such as migrant and unemployed experiences, and asked each group to compile a questionnaire that they could use in an oral history interview. Significantly, the pupils recognised which information they could likely find in documentary materials, allowing them to focus primarily on the lived experience of the respondents in the questions which they developed. They also showed an excellent awareness of good interview practice and the ways in which questions should be presented to ensure a positive interview experience and the collection of useful data. This awareness was largely due to time spent at the beginning of the project when we focused on the broader research process before slowly narrowing our focus to oral testimony, an approach which worked very well.

Oral testimonies in the project

One error which we made when approaching the collaboration was to assume that pupils and staff would provide access to those who worked in the locomotive

industry and would be willing to be interviewed. As with most areas which have faced economic transition through deindustrialisation, Springburn has undergone a significant demographic change in the last thirty years with large levels of outward and inward migration. As a result, only one of the pupils involved in our group had a relation who worked in the industry but who was unable to participate when we began seeking respondents. As well as this, most of the teaching staff we spoke to were from other areas of Glasgow. Through luck, four months into the project a cleaner in the school pointed us to a local pub where she believed we would find interviewees. I visited a former railway worker who agreed to participate in an interview with the pupils. Our aim was to allow groups of two or three pupils to conduct the interviews, thus giving everyone the chance to have this experience.

Before our first interview, the pupils constructed a questionnaire based on their knowledge of Springburn and the local area, focusing on the respondents' employment histories, their recollections of daily life in Springburn and the impact of socio-economic change. The interview was led by two pupils under my supervision in the school and afforded some excellent insights. When I spoke to them afterwards, I gained some useful insights as to my own role. Asking them about the experience, I learned that it was one that they really enjoyed; but that they felt that I was too quick to ask follow-up questions throughout the interview, which limited their ability to do this for themselves and impacted on their confidence in leading an interview. I was trying to gain as much information as possible from the interview. However, I realised that if the young learners were to enjoy the experience and develop their skills, it should be left to them to dictate the flow of the interview with the lead researcher leaving follow-up questions until after the pupils had exhausted their own schedule.

We conducted interviews with four respondents recruited through an old people's community centre based in Springburn. With their training, the pupils demonstrated an excellent ability to lead the interview, ask follow-up questions and involve each participant as fully as possible. I transcribed the interviews and produced time-coded summaries of the transcripts and then split the discussion into groups with a range of questions relating to Springburn, the industry and its decline, thus encouraging the pupils to engage critically with the transcripts. The interviewees' testimony was highly useful in developing the research. The pupils used the interview data to construct a fantastic presentation considering the significance of locomotive production to Springburn, health and safety in the workplace, the diverse impacts of industrial decline and the changing perspectives of Springburn residents regarding prospects for its future development. What was important was that they recognised the value of engaging with members of their community in investigating the past, and appreciated the impact of dramatic economic change on the day-to-day lives of those who had lived in Springburn. Interestingly, the pupils

demonstrated an excellent understanding of the generational differences of perspectives. Whereas the respondents' narratives focussed collectively on the problems faced by the area following deindustrialisation and the bleak outlook for those currently living there, the pupils recognised their difference in perspective due to the transition from an industrial economy to one more interconnected with the rest of Glasgow.

Challenges of collaboration with secondary schools

This was the first year of MUSE's involvement in Springburn Academy and this meant that there were a number of challenges which, at times, made running the project difficult. Ensuring effective communication is a key priority when working with a secondary school. Letts points out that oral historians beginning a project with a school 'should be prepared for equal amounts of hard work and frustration', and this was true of our experience in Springburn.⁴

Schools are hectic environments, with a wide range of extra-curricular projects and initiatives being run alongside the results-driven school curriculum. As a result, emails go unanswered and school staff will not always respond when the project needs them to. There were occasions when we would arrive at the school to discover that more than half of our group could not attend the discussion as they were participating in another activity. The last session of the school year, during which we aimed to receive as much feedback as possible, was attended by only four pupils as the timetable had changed and the rest of the group were unavailable. This had not been communicated to SOHC staff. One thing I learned about working with a school is the importance of discussing and agreeing on how communications are to be set up. We needed guarantees from the school that we would be told of any changes or alterations as early as possible so that we could keep as far as possible to our intended plan.

Being an outsider with no direct affiliation to the school also presents problems. Whilst the school may be eager to participate in the project, use of resources and materials is dependent on the institution's goodwill and this can cause difficulty, particularly when communication is poor. We asked the school to let parents know through the monthly newsletter that we were looking to recruit interviewees. The school agreed and we constructed an advertising document, but because it was not seen to be a high priority in terms of the running of the school, it was left out each time. There were also several instances when we would discover that our usual room was being used for staff meetings, meaning that half an hour would be lost waiting for it to become available or having to search the building for alternative accommodation. Another time our discussion was disrupted after thirty minutes, as the invigilators of school exams had been instructed to use our allocated room during their breaks, forcing us to abandon that day's discussion. Significantly, this was noticed by pupils, who then had to change their

plans for collection from school and other activities they were involved with, causing further disruption to the discussion.

Based on our experiences, if collaboration with schools is to be a success, it is essential that issues of resources and accommodation are settled at the outset to minimise the impact of disruption on the project, the staff and pupils. When there is a new relationship between different institutions, these issues can be expected and a researcher will need to be adaptable in the first year of a project, whilst making note of the problems which will need to be sorted out before the next project. The SOHC are in the fortunate position of continuing the relationship with Springburn Academy in the 2014-2015 academic year with a new group of pupils and have met with staff to resolve these problems. However, if the project is a one-off, then the researcher should aim to address any concerns as early as possible.

A further issue, depending on the objectives of a project, is the conflicting aims of the school and the researcher in the selection of pupils. As I have pointed out, my primary objective was to encourage pupils to consider progression to university as an option available to them after school, one which they could enjoy and be successful in pursuing. In this first year, the school selected the pupils who would participate and, whilst we got fantastic pupils who were great to work with, the vast majority of them had already decided that they would go on to higher education. It is natural for secondary schools to put forward their best students and make a positive impression on the university and the researchers involved. However, this can also defeat the aim of raising aspiration, a central objective of this initiative. We discussed this with the school, and in future the project will increasingly target pupils who have demonstrated potential to perform highly, but who could benefit from additional training to raise their attainment and ambition, widening access to university for more pupils considering their options once leaving Springburn Academy.

Benefits of collaboration with secondary schools

Despite the challenges outlined above, there were substantial benefits for all involved in this project, demonstrating the potential impact of collaboration with a secondary school. In its first year, the MUSE project has largely been a success at the University of Strathclyde. Significantly, each partner institution and the researchers involved have enthusiastically agreed to continue their involvement into the next academic year. There have also been moves made by a range of different departments within the university to become involved in projects, and contact has been made with a number of other schools. The School Engagement Coordinator, June Cunningham, stated in the internal annual review of the MUSE initiative that the Springburn project had been particularly successful in involving a diverse group of pupils, expanding their



Group discussion between the pupils and myself (top right).

ability and confidence, as well as representing research with an impact within the academic community. For the SOHC, this project has had several benefits as it represents a new mode of community engagement.

Expanding engagement in oral history is a core aim of the SOHC and this project allowed the centre to engage with the school, the pupils and the wider Springburn community, which is a sustainable relationship as the project will continue until 2016 and we have worked to involve the community further. The 2014-2015 project will examine the Springburn Winter Gardens, a Victorian glasshouse abandoned in the 1980s, around which there has been a large campaign for restoration. The secondary school project will engage with those who have campaigned for restoration and contribute to an oral history exhibition should the campaign be successful and the Winter Gardens is restored and operating as a community space. The 2013-2014 project also received a substantial level of exposure throughout the University of Strathclyde, with two research posters produced and presented to staff across the university and partner groups. This provided an excellent platform from which to demonstrate the practical use of oral history research to those with less knowledge of the approach, and the involvement of the SOHC in Glasgow's communities. Additionally, the testimonies will be added to the SOHC archive, providing a substantial resource for researchers using oral history to examine a wide range of topics.

The benefits for interviewees involved in oral history projects are discussed thoroughly elsewhere;⁵ however,

engaging with their local school added a new dynamic to their enjoyment. Each interviewee was highly interested in being given the opportunity to discuss their working life with pupils unfamiliar with Springburn's locomotive industry when they were first approached and were much less cautious and hesitant than respondents sought for an academic project. They thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of going into a school which most of them had attended, albeit in a new building and with a change of name in 2002. This was the first time that the respondents had returned since it had been rebuilt, something which was frequently commented on before and during the interviews as they demonstrated their pleasure at being given the opportunity to return to 'Albert Senior Secondary School'.

The most important positive outcomes were for the pupils involved. These were wide-ranging and not anticipated fully at the beginning of the project. Their confidence improved visibly, an aspect recognised by teaching staff at the school. The clearest example of this was their presentation at a SOHC seminar in April 2014. When this was first suggested, a number of pupils requested not to take part because of nervousness about public speaking, particularly in a university environment. However, once we had completed our research and begun constructing the presentation, every pupil agreed to take part, thus demonstrating increased confidence from joining in the open discussions and the interview process. Teaching staff who were familiar with them in the normal school environment were highly encouraged. Pauline Coyle, the acting deputy head

teacher (DHT), stated in her end of year summary of MUSE that she could not believe that the entire group were so eager to present at the university.

The pupils' confidence was further boosted by the positive feedback from the audience at the SOHC seminar following an excellent presentation. This was recognised by the school at the end of year awards ceremony where each pupil received a special award for their participation. This experience of interviewing respondents and presenting research will be important once they leave school, particularly those who were initially hesitant about participating. They were also able to see the importance of the research and the potentially large audience interested in their work. The process of coming into the university also demystified higher education for the pupils. They could see a university environment for themselves, more so than through scheduled visits and open days. The pupils came in on a weekday afternoon and were able to spend time on campus before presenting, seeing university students studying and socialising, highlighting the informality and 'normality' of higher education.

The majority of the pupils selected by the school to take part were high-achieving students, already on the path to higher education. Even so, there were some indicators of improved attainment amongst the group which school staff partly attributed to their participation. Two pupils advanced a level for the Scottish Qualifications Authority examinations which they sat at the end of the year during their participation and others demonstrated improvement in different areas of their school work. This is highly significant when considering the value of an oral history-based research project and was recognised by the acting DHT, who suggested that those pupils not classed as high flyers gained most through their participation. Although this project has only run for one school year, these early indicators provide some evidence of the ability of an extra-curricular oral history project to engage pupils further with their education, which should be a key motivation for researchers looking to work with school pupils. In the remainder of this article I discuss how I felt the running of this project contributed to the improved confidence and educational performance of the pupils involved. My overall aim is to begin a larger discussion amongst oral historians about engagement with schools and how this can contribute to further benefit the both researchers and pupils involved.

Research for research's sake

The involvement of the SOHC in this initiative was not finalised until two weeks before the project began, which impacted significantly on the way in which the project developed. This lack of preparation time, whilst presenting a problem in the beginning, worked to the benefit of the project in the long term. When first visiting the school and meeting with pupils, we had very little idea of how we would develop our project or what practical research outcomes we aimed to achieve. This meant that a substantial element of our project was

'research for research's sake', as opposed to focusing on a specified outcome, as is more often the case with academic and school work. The result was a relaxed and informal atmosphere, as there was no pressure on the pupils or SOHC staff to achieve specified outcomes. We were able to have open discussions and to go off on tangents based on questions raised throughout the sessions. There were occasions when we would do very little project work, discussing current affairs, music and anything else which was brought up, without the worry of falling behind a prescribed research schedule. This further contributed to the informality of the discussions and allowed pupils to have a large degree of input into how our sessions and discussions flowed, creating a more relaxed atmosphere when we did discuss our research. We had a full school year during which to work with the pupils and were not overly affected by time constraints. This also allowed us to spend the amount of time that we did on the basics of research, ensuring that the pupils had an excellent understanding of gathering source materials critically before beginning our own project and discussing the use of oral testimonies.

Based on this experience it is my view that to conduct a successful extra-curricular oral history project and benefit the pupils involved as much as possible, researchers should aim to be in the school for as long a period as is feasible and conduct research without specified objectives. This may seem counter-productive, but by allowing the project to flow naturally, based on the changing ability and confidence of the pupils the collaboration can deliver a range of positive outcomes, as we discovered from our joint work with Springburn Academy. By creating an informal atmosphere, the pupils had an opportunity to engage with a way of learning that was different to what they are used to in their normal school day. They were more able to express themselves and take ownership of the development of their project rather than being given a prescribed set of tasks to complete towards a fixed and specified objective.

A non-classroom environment

A key aspect in ensuring that an extra-curricular oral history research project can improve the confidence and attainment of the pupils involved is making sure that group meetings are not held in a classroom environment. Pupils spend almost their entire school careers in classrooms, with specific customs and norms prescribed by education authorities. In an extra-curricular activity it is important to remove these restrictions so that they have greater freedom of thought and expression, particularly those in the later years of secondary school. There was no teacher involved in our sessions. This was unplanned at the beginning and encouraged the pupils to engage in the project in ways that they wanted to, without regard for school etiquette or punishments which come from a failure to comply with rules. Within the limits of working with young people they spoke freely and

openly during the discussions. Swearing and colloquialisms were permitted as this allowed everyone to speak in the manner which they were most comfortable with and this added to the conversational atmosphere of the sessions. Within four weeks of meeting they became demonstrably more relaxed, contributing to discussions where they had been quiet and reserved when we first began. Whereas schools often attempt to restrict language used in the classroom, an oral history project with working-class school pupils should seek to remove such controls and promote regular interaction as this can encourage everyone involved to contribute fully to the discussion in ways that they feel comfortable with, much the same as we seek to do with interviewees. In our experience of working with the pupils of Springburn Academy it was clear that the informality of the discussions was a central aspect in promoting a productive environment for developing the pupils' skills and our research project, helping to improve the confidence and educational performance of the pupils involved.

Conclusion

The experience of the SOHC collaboration with Springburn Academy has demonstrated the potential impact that an oral history project can have on the confidence and attainment of school pupils. The pupils are more confident in joining and leading discussions, have gained important skills for critically analysing data and there are early indications that this has translated

into increased educational attainment. These outcomes demonstrate the range of benefits available in undertaking such work, alongside the project itself and the data collected. My aim here has been to present a reflective analysis based on the first year of the SOHC-Springburn Academy collaboration and to encourage discussion amongst oral historians interested in working with school pupils. What I have learned is that it is essential that researchers adapt as best as possible to the challenges of working in a school environment while working continuously to minimise them.

Based on this experience, I am suggesting that for students to benefit from taking part a project should not be bound by the limits of research objectives and specified outcomes but allowed to develop in accordance with the changing ability of those involved. This creates a far more organic research path for the pupils to engage with at their own level, giving them control of the project whilst creating excellent oral history. Researchers should attempt to make the discussions as enjoyable as possible, to differentiate them from their regular school work and classroom experience. I hope that discussions at the 2014 Oral History conference, along with this article, can lead to increased dialogue between oral historians working in schools across the UK to disseminate ideas based on our practical experiences, increasing the impact of such projects on those involved and increasing the involvement of oral historians in schools working on different topics within diverse settings.

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NOTES

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Address for correspondence:
andrew.clark@strath.ac.uk