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Why there was no depression amongst cavemen¹ - the approach of Queen Mary's Grammar School to the delivery of PSHE

When I completed my PGCE in German just over ten years ago, I knew I would have to dabble in a bit of French teaching (despite having no formal qualifications in it at that point), but that was it. Since then, I've masqueraded not only as a French teacher, but also a History teacher, a Japanese teacher (yes, I do have formal qualifications in that, strangely), a Literacy Support tutor, an EPQ tutor and, of course, a PSHE teacher. Is there any other subject that can make staff and students' eyes roll simultaneously?

I, however, am a proud convert to the growing PSHE movement. Before summer 2016, when the idea was first put to me that I might like to consider becoming PSHE Coordinator, I will be honest and admit that nothing could have been more unappealing. Of course, the little experience I had of PSHE was enforced tutor periods that ticked another Ofsted box. Yet thanks to my school generously allowing me to attend numerous training courses and events, I began to realise that PSHE is the exact opposite of its traditional reputation - it is the most exciting and the most useful subject in the entire secondary curriculum. No other subject is as wide-ranging, as quickly evolving, as cross-curricular, and as engaging to minds both young and old(er).

Wearing a onesie in class

At QMGS, PSHE provision is delivered school-wide through themed weeks, where each year group's Year Assembly focuses on the same topic (currently 'Switch-off Fortnight', a campaign by

EDF Energy's schools' programme The Pod to encourage people to conserve energy), and is followed up by a form period at the end of the week with a linked activity. Each KS3 class, however, has one period per fortnight taught by me, and the model currently being followed is that all year groups cover the same themes at the same time, with age-appropriate sub-topics at each stage. These themes are: mental health, financial literacy, physical health (including nutrition), media safety, First Aid, diversity and discrimination, being part of a local and international community, sex and relationships. This is the first year of such a structured, spiral approach to PSHE, and I too am evolving as a teacher as a result of this change in role.

For PSHE lessons to be effective, pupils need to feel as if they are under less pressure than in the academic classroom. They are more likely to open up and enjoy the lesson content (emphasis on the first syllable) if they feel content (now the second). Therefore, I've had to ditch my high-discipline black cloak - only to put it back on 50 minutes later when I'm an MFL teacher again - and replace it with a plush, cuddly onesie (metaphorically meant, of course). It is important to set the tone of the lesson before pupils come in, warn them (and for certain topics, 'warn' is not too strong a word) of what is to come and how they should therefore act. I want my PSHE classroom to provide a sanctuary - whether the young people realise they need it or not - from the switched on, non-stop lifestyle we all live today. Therefore, I won't shout

1. Therapeutic Lifestyle Change Project: depressed subjects were asked to incorporate lifestyle changes (which have also become known as "Caveman Therapy") into their lives for several weeks. Changes included: eating an omega-3 rich diet; getting regular daily exercise; getting plenty of natural sunlight; getting ample sleep every night; being involved in some type of social activity where social connections were made; and participation in meaningful tasks that leave little time for negative thoughts - all things that our ancestors had in abundance. Research subjects demonstrated reductions in depression. Ilardi, S. 2010. [The Depression Cure](#). Vermilion.

over the top of them to get them to be quiet. Instead, I'll talk at a normal volume, and wait for each individual to notice and pay attention, congratulating them when they do, which in turn encourages others to follow. I have found that a calm approach to getting pupils to do what you need is just as effective as a short, sharp blast of a command, and subtly teaches them to be mindful and aware of the world around them, watching and listening for me instead of just charging ahead with their own agenda. Couldn't we all do with practising that?

Equally, the activities we carry out in the PSHE classroom should not be referred to as 'work', and the avoidance of this one small word brings benefits for both pupil and teacher. Neither of us feels pressure to 'get things done' – and in fact recently, when a Year 7 class was asked to list what they were grateful for at that given moment, one pupil highlighted exactly that. Partly thanks to a senior leadership team comfortable with giving subject leads jurisdiction over how they assess, I feel no compulsion to mark what my pupils produce in lessons – or as I prefer, 'sessions'. For each session to function well, things need to look different and feel different, to allow the pupils a safe space to 'think different'. Therefore in my classroom, the desks are arranged not in rows, but in such a way that pupils can face one another, and after some deliberation in the early weeks of the year, you will from now on find no diagnostic marking in pupils' folders. Admittedly, this goes against what I have learned on courses regarding assessing pupils' progress in PSHE, but for me, the folders are not designed to be a formal record of learning in the same way as an exercise book is, but to provide pupils with a 'handbook for life' that they can refer back to in later years.

This is not to say that I don't look through the pupils' folders. Indeed, on a couple of occasions already, they have proved invaluable in bringing to my attention issues which I could then pass on to the relevant Head of Year. For example, there was a boy whose father had died some years ago, but we had not been informed by either the family or the boy's previous school, and another who, based on what he had written, clearly needed help with emerging mental health issues. In PSHE, we are lucky to be freed from the restraints of the academic classroom and the compulsion to do things as they've always been done (I am an

advocate for providing pupils and parents with suggested additional study activities rather than formalised homework). Lesson plans are more fluid, and we have legitimate reason to 'go with the flow', as long as the discussion is still relevant and important. Nevertheless, we do still have essential content which needs covering, so I am thinking of adding a 'Question Box' to each lesson handout, so that any issues pupils want to explore further can be saved until after we have met our objectives. Yes, I do believe we should still have lesson objectives, but not necessarily that these need to be communicated to pupils. After all, the lesson needs to look less like a lesson.

"I haven't learned a single thing in PSHE so far"

...a member of staff told me once that they had heard a pupil say. Thankfully, a conversation with me afterwards helped the pupil to realise that this statement was more bravado than strict truth, but it does highlight the biggest challenge facing the many driven and passionate PSHE leads in the UK. How do we get pupils to buy into what we are trying to get through to them? Where I teach, we have intellectually above-average boys who, even at a relatively young age, are set on a chosen career (most often doctors, but also lawyers, and such-like). For some, anything which they deem unrelated to their chosen career (and in their eyes, that means anything not subject knowledge based), is a waste of their time. We need to smash through that closed-minded approach to education which dictates that its sole purpose is to lead you to a job. After all, as I say to the pupils, your job will take up eight hours of your day – PSHE is where you learn to deal with the other 16. (And yes, I do know that doctors, lawyers – and teachers! – work more than eight hours a day, but being realistic would have reduced the dramatic impact of the statement.)

Therefore, it is even more important in PSHE for teachers to make the material relevant and trustworthy, because it is so much harder for it to gain credence with young people than it is with Biology, or Maths, for example. We are so lucky that so many high-profile organisations such as the Red Cross and Child Bereavement UK actually provide lesson plans and materials now, that there are charities such as YGAM who offer excellent training and resources, projects such as

ThinkSmart from Coventry University committed to improving academic performance through character education, and via Twitter I have networked with mental health experts and other PSHE leads to share information and ideas. I have also drawn upon my own self-help reading, using the work of a truly life-changing book, *The Depression Cure* by Dr Steve Ilardi¹, to teach pupils about the vital components of a mentally healthy lifestyle. I have spent a good deal of time converting all of the fascinating and edifying material I have come across into concepts which (hopefully) engage pupils and which they find easy to understand. For example, we look at 'R.A.I.N.: Errors which cloud your thinking' (Reading minds and fortune telling - ; Augmentation - ; I, me, myself and Negative glasses), discuss how your mind can sometimes be like a matador taunting you by waving a red flag to your brain, and, though life may have been brutish and short, why we should try to be more like cavemen¹.

Change Your Mind

Mental health has been a priority for QMGS the past couple of years, for reasons I need not explain. Alongside our taught lessons, Key Stage 4 pupils have attended workshops with one of our brilliant Social, Emotional and Mental Health mentors, and Key Stage 5 pupils have been trained as Mental Health Ambassadors with the organisation Time for Change. Last February, we held our first Mental Health Awareness Week, with a staff coffee morning, year and whole-school assemblies, Year 7 PSHE lessons on digital detoxing delivered by 6th-formers and a parents' awareness evening with the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust. Plans are currently underway for an even bigger and better awareness week in February 2018, with a specific focus for each Key Stage: e-safety for KS3, stress management for KS4, and LGBT mental health for KS5. One of our mottos is 'life to the full', and whilst we pride ourselves on offering pupils a wide range of opportunities and experiences throughout their time here, from volunteering at a local care home to trekking in the Himalayas, it is equally important to us that we give pupils the tools to be able to cope with the abundantly varied and fulfilling lives we intend them to lead. We want to not only help them discover the world, but guide them as they learn to function well in it.

One of the projects I am most proud of, however, is 'Change Your Mind'. What started as a fledgling idea this time last year to enter the Speaker's School Council Awards (run on behalf of the Speaker of the House of Commons), led a small group of our Year 12 pupils into six local primary schools to deliver mental health workshops on the themes of 'Transition' and 'Digital Detoxing'. After much positive feedback from our partner schools, we were delighted to hear that we had been awarded the runners-up prize in the 17-19 age category of this national competition. Our prize was to be awarded with a commemorative plaque from our local MP, Valerie Vaz, who even mentioned the project when speaking in the House of Commons the day before her visit.

In the last two weeks, the project has been re-launched for the coming academic year, with a wider suite of workshops to choose from (now including Diversity, Bullying and Community Action), and five Walsall primaries have signed up already. We are even now venturing beyond our town's borders, with a Birmingham primary-only multi-academy trust interested in our work, and 25 new Year 12s have signed up to deliver sessions. We even have pin badges and a logo! In all seriousness, however, PSHE is no different to any other subject in that learning is most effective when *lived* and *applied*, not studied. Through PSHE-related projects such as this, we can encourage the emerging adult generation to give back to a society which has already given so generously to them.

The future

As mentioned earlier, I am relatively new to this role and am by no means an expert in PSHE education, nor can I claim that there is no more progress to be made in terms of our PSHE provision. We need to find innovative ways to allow Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils greater access to the 'Curriculum for Life' that will equip them navigate the at times overwhelming challenges posed by even the everyday and ordinary. Could Year 10 pupils opt into a PSHE-themed project qualification? Could KS5 students attend sessions on a sign-up basis? How can our Citizenship Ambassadors group, formed last year, play a bigger role in PSHE provision across the school? How can we continue to teach SMSC discreetly,

like we do now through, for instance, our after-school sign language lessons?

Last May, I gave a whole-school assembly to update pupils on what had been going on in PSHE over the previous few months, and to emphasise to them that our school is committed to cultivating each person, and not just his CV. I reminded them that every aspect of their daily lives – what they choose to eat, what time they go to bed, how they will handle their relationships with their peers, their partners, their children – will be guided by the information, discussions and other activities

they engage in during PSHE sessions. What I didn't mention is how PSHE helps parents in driving forward their cognitive, cultural and social learning. It can encourage pupils to do the right thing for its own sake, instead of in order to avoid punishment, and give them the information they need to become a healthy, productive, happy and fulfilled citizen of their homes, their towns, their nations and their world. What is that, if not the very definition of fulfilling and rewarding work?

Education and Health

The journal, published by SHEU since 1983, is aimed at those involved with education and health who are concerned with the health and wellbeing of young people. Readership is worldwide and in the UK include: primary; secondary and further education teachers; university staff and health-care professionals working in education and health settings. The journal is online and open access, continues the proud tradition of independent publishing and offers an eclectic mix of articles.

Contributors (see a recent list) - Do you have up to 3000 words about a relevant issue that you would like to see published? Please contact the Editor

Education and Health Archive

Each issue of the journal, published since 1983, is available via the archive. There are several simple indices that help to identify articles by keywords; year/issue number; author surname and article title. It can be seen that some contributors have had a number of articles published and there are a range of topics that have been covered over the years. Sometimes a contributor will update their article or develop points raised by another contributor. The pages on the website, that have been provided for the Education and Health journal, usually have the highest number of 'reads' across all pages on this Internet site.

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"The (SHEU survey) helped us to prioritise where we needed to be in terms of PSHE education. We delivered assemblies based on the evidence as well as curriculum development, and dealt with whole school issues – particularly in regard to pastoral care. The answers received to the question on the survey Who are you most likely to approach if you needed help worried staff as teacher was not a popular answer. Subsequently the staff asked themselves why this had happened and what needed to be done to address the issue. There was more emphasis on wider aspects of PSHE education delivery, which needed more attention. To summarise, the (SHEU survey) allows the PSHE department to assess the impact of teaching and learning and modify future lessons accordingly. It allows our school to look at whole school issues such as the extent to which the pastoral care system is meeting the needs of our pupils. It helps us to do need analysis of our pupils. It helps to provide important evidence for SEF / the extent to which we are meeting wellbeing indicators / National Healthy School standards." Secondary School Head

For more details please visit <http://sheu.org.uk>