

I reach 60 and retire well pleased with PSHE and the way it has become established, no longer hidden "in the cupboard" but out in the open for all to take part and benefit.

Gillian Feest was the Devon County Council Adviser for PSHE & Citizenship from 1994-2004.

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Reflections on 10 years as an Adviser for PSHE

PSHE provides one route to offer skills and understanding. It continues to offer what it did to us in those early days, a way of talking together to be heard, to share our feelings, to understand who we are and who others are.

Ten years ago the drive to promote the variously called PSE or PME or Health Education in secondary schools had moved into 'hidden cupboards' across the educational scene. This occurred despite such initiatives as Developmental Group Work and Active Tutorial Work that flourished in the 1970's and the 1980's. There were also the beginnings of PSE work in the Primary setting. However, educationalists believed that "Primary schools did this anyway", and it was thought to simply be in the ether of good primary practice although it could not necessarily be seen.

Devon LEA

Devon LEA had always held the emotional development of pupils dear. Way back in the 1970's Devon offered funding to any secondary school wishing to employ a school counsellor. And many did, as well as second teachers to a year's full time course to gain their certificate in school counselling¹.

In those days a range of universities offered full time postgraduate courses. Devon LEA along with the St Lukes Trust had also funded a large and complex research and training programme into the work of Dr Lesley Button

which he had called Developmental Group Work (DGW).

Circle time

Whilst secondary schools were the main focus of this DGW some of the Exeter Middle schools were involved and 10 days a year training was on offer to schools as well as opportunities for writing and research into the impact of the work. This work formed the basis of what was later to be loosely called "circle time".

During this research period 1984-1994 the exploration of ways to use this style of learning was taken into younger and younger age groups with startlingly successful effects. The primary classroom proved to be a very effective place for pupils to use inter-active learning styles to develop personal and social skills. There was also evidence of the same teaching and learning techniques increasing their attainment in other subjects, their confidence as learners and raising their self esteem in all aspects of school life.

Career path

My own career path had been through primary school teaching, working with couples,

1. Editor - Gillian Feest wrote an article, ('Education and Health', vol. 18, no.1, 2000), that described the valuable role and work of the school counsellor. 'Can schools afford not to have a counsellor', is available as a free downloadable pdf file from www.sheu.org.uk/pubs/eh.htm
A photocopy is also available from SHEU (please enclose a s.a.e.).

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families and individuals as a therapist, and as a trainer in group work skills and experiential learning for adults and children.

I had been a part of the DGW work at the university within Exeter middle schools looking at using DGW in the primary setting and then at ways of teaching teachers the necessary skills to develop emotional literacy, speaking and listening, co-operation skills etc with the youngest pupils. It was for me hugely exciting to be translating the techniques, long used in therapy into the primary classroom as a means of prevention rather than cure.

Perhaps it is always true that important initiatives are always initially being developed unnoticed. It is hard to believe looking back that primary schools knew little of PSHE or of using structured ways of promoting interactive learning.

PSHE advisory team

When I was appointed to work across the county primary schools in 1995 in the PSHE advisory team it was still a subject many primary schools hadn't heard of.

It was however just at the time that there were causes for concern for the moral well being of our young people. The huge escalation in IT communications, rise in illegal drug use and the spread of HIV/AIDS were seen as a backdrop to the constraints of a tightened curriculum and greater accountability for schools. A cause for concern was about how we were preparing young people for adult life and worries about what was perceived to be their increased difficult behaviour. Add this to a national rise in divorce and family breakdown and PSHE was back on the agenda.

During the following years Government set up a variety of think tanks to look at citizenship, PSHE, SRE and eventually came up with suggestions for all three. 1999 also saw the introduction of the National Healthy Schools programme funded through Standards Fund and the arrival of both healthy schools monies and monies through the Drug Action Teams for substance abuse prevention.

What a time to be the PSHE Adviser

Money, national guidelines, good resources and inter-agency support flowed in. What had appeared to be a "fringe activity" became common practice. In Devon, where we had always had PSHE, even in the lean times,

schools now had support to put children's emotional health, well being and holistic development at the centre of their work - health in the widest possible context.

We, as an LEA, had the opportunity to promote a huge range of training for all our schools through the additional funding. We also had funding to employ a team of people who could go into schools to support them as they developed policies, programmes of study, different ways of approaching problems and giving pupils a voice to make decisions about their own classes, schools and communities.

Of course the nations problems continue to look worse but children have become more able to talk about hidden emotions and abuses, concerns and anxieties. Adults too have learnt new ways of thinking about how to best help young people live in this ever increasingly complex world.

Personal view

My personal view of the world is not that it is getting worse but that we know more about what is happening, are more able to talk about injustice and to think about what effect our actions as individuals and as a nation have on the world around us. The Internet has made all knowledge available to us at all times of the day and night and the adults of tomorrow have to manage that.

Schools as well as parents have to help them. PSHE provides one route to offer skills and understanding. It continues to offer what it did to us in those early days, a way of talking together to be heard, to share our feelings, to understand who we are and who others are.

We have come full circle. "Every Child Matters" (www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters) will enable us to work across agencies to promote the well being of the whole child. Emotional literacy is in the curriculum, the work of Healthy Schools is well established. The teaching of SRE is established in nearly all our schools.

We have learnt that we must concern ourselves with the whole person and that just to look at educational standards in isolation excludes and narrows our understanding of what is to be human.

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