

Luke Sweetland's Development Work: **Engaging students with tutor time activities** at Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden

Luke Sweetland had trained as an animator and worked in the film industry before realising that his true vocation was teaching. He had been inspired to become a teacher by the man who had been his art teacher when he had attended Sir John Lawes School as a student. The school welcomed Luke back into the fold and employed him straight away, enabling him to qualify as a teacher under the Graduate Teaching Programme (GTP).

In his first year of teaching Luke became passionate about his role as Form Tutor. He had read about the role of the form tutor and pastoral care (Marland and Rogers, 2004) as part of the GTP. He had also benefited from a good practical induction into the role. He became particularly interested in the 'Thought for the week' aspect of that which was designed to build student's interpersonal qualities and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996). This was a whole-school activity in which the form tutors would be provided with a word or phrase such as 'dealing with adversity' together with a few quotations. This information was to be used in the 20 minute weekly lesson to lead a discussion with the students. However, preparing for the discussion activity, often without much notice, was quite challenging and so when Luke was appointed as Assistant Head of Year 8 in the following year, he decided to focus on this problem.

Luke could see the potential of the 'Thought for the week' activity to help students to develop confidence in reflecting on their emotions and discussing them within the group. This would impact on their learning more generally and on their developing citizenship. His first step was to review the sheets he had been supplied with. They seemed rather dry and one dimensional being just a series of quotations such as: "Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds (Franklin D. Roosevelt)". He looked at other published materials (e.g. Messina, 2003) and started to create a series of powerpoint slides with more exciting visuals and sound. For example, one of these used a James Bond sort of character – Agent

ACE – to help the students explore risk-taking. Luke gathered feedback from students by posing a few simple questions on a feedback slip to be completed anonymously. He asked about the students' enjoyment of the enhanced thought-for-the-week materials, how they could be improved and how the experience had helped them. The feedback was broadly encouraging although the suggestions for improvement contained a salutary reminder of the standard of presentation that young people are accustomed to in the media they have access to in their own homes. They wanted more animation, more music, more humour and interactivity. Some of the comments about the benefits of the lessons were particularly encouraging, for example:

It encouraged me, for example to be more confident and positive. Now I try to contribute more to lessons.

At a Staff Conference in the Spring Term, Luke and his colleague Danielle led a workshop for staff in which he presented his slide shows and some Year 8 students were asked to talk about their experience with these materials. The materials were welcomed by colleagues although some expressed concern about the amount of time they thought would be involved in creating them. The workshop was also a good opportunity for colleagues to discuss the use of tutor time and as a result it was agreed that Luke would lead the development of an 'Activity Handbook' for tutors.

The handbook that Luke subsequently produced was in an electronic format accessible on the staff intranet. In addition to the Thought-for-the-week materials it contained games, revision guidelines and guidance material that had already been written by a colleague. A member of the senior leadership team had suggested to Luke that he should talk to a colleague, Maureen Standen, who had previously produced some materials she called 'Tutoring without tears'. The finished handbook was to be presented to the whole staff at the next staff conference.

In the Summer Term, Luke was asked to participate in a whole school review of the pastoral care system which involved him carrying out an observation of Year 9 tutor lessons. In one case the tutor had asked some of the students to lead the Thought-for-the-week activity and this was a revelation to Luke. He noted in his observation journal:

The tutor had students delivering thought for the week. This engaged other students and the discussion felt alive. This was such an obvious idea that had completely bypassed me. I was left feeling that this could be built on.

Luke saw the enormous potential of this approach and began to plan for a new development project in which a team of twelve students would work together to devise Thought-for-the-week activities which they could lead in pairs with each of the six tutor groups in their year group.

References

Goleman, D. (2006) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury.

Marland, M. & Rogers, R. (2004) *How to Be a Successful Form Tutor*. London: Continuum.

Messina, C. (2003) *Brain Friendly Guidance Activities to Build Emotional Intelligence*. Milton Keynes: Incentive Plus.