Samantha Murray's Development Work:
Using Key Stage 3 teaching strategies with post-16 History students
at The Thomas Alleyne School, Stevenage

As a teacher of History, Samantha was concerned at the lack of motivation of some of her post-16 students. She felt that a negative disposition contributed to low examination grades. She was very positive however about developments across the school in learning and teaching at Key Stage 3 and wondered if she could apply some of her new understanding to developing more effective ways of working at post-16.

Samantha joined the Teacher Led Development Work group running in the school in 2005/6 so that she could share her ideas with others and develop a way of experimenting with new ways of working in her classroom. She felt that student passivity was a key issue in her lessons and was interested in Ginnis's (2001) view that student stimulation is a major factor in successful learning. Samantha often used a variety of activities to encourage lower school students to engage with learning. She wondered if adapting some of these activities for use with older students would have a positive effect on their engagement and motivation to learn. She was particularly interested to explore whether the use of such activities would support her older students in developing as independent learners, as suggested by QCA[7] (2005).

She decided to teach a module of work using the lesson format and activities she had developed for her Key Stage 3 lessons. She planned to experiment with this way of teaching her post-16 students at the start of the Spring Term. The school had recently used a learning preferences profiling instrument to establish each student's most preferred way of learning. Teachers were given this information about the students they taught so Samantha decided to make use of this in planning her new-style lessons.

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[7] QCA: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Samantha wrote detailed lesson plans to guide her work. Each lesson was divided into 3 or 4 parts. Each lesson included activities to appeal to students with diverse learning preferences. Games, movement around the classroom, oral and aural work were all included. Samantha wanted the students to keep journals to record their reflections on these activities. She would then link this evidence to her own journal entries. She also planned to take photographs of the students at work which could be used as the basis for discussion about the value of these learning activities. However, things do not always go to plan. Samantha was asked to take on a new post within the school and a bout of ill health also intervened and she was unable to start this experimental stage of her project until the Summer Term. There was not enough time to complete all the elements in her original project action plan so she abandoned the idea of journals. She was able to take photographs of students in the classroom, however.

Students' enjoyment is one indicator of motivation and Samantha wanted a simple way of recording students' level of enjoyment throughout the lesson. She provided each student with a blank graph with 10 minute intervals marked along the x axis and levels of enjoyment on a scale of 1-10 on the y axis. Students were asked to rate their level of enjoyment of the lesson using this instrument at ten minute intervals throughout the lesson. An analysis of the graphs and of the supporting photographs against the detailed lesson plans confirmed Samantha's view that students were more engaged in their learning when they were involved in these activities usually favoured lower down the school. She was more surprised to learn that students could be equally engaged by less active elements of the lesson as long as they found the work stimulating. The photographs also gave Samantha some further understanding of students' abilities to work independently. She found that it was very clear who was fully committed to a given task, who was leading group work and who was disengaged.

Samantha was keen to share what she had discovered with other teachers in the school. She discussed what she was observing with other members of the Teacher Led Development Work group and planned to share her observations more widely across the school. She was also interested in the views of other History teachers and therefore contributed to a seminar on teaching and learning for post 16 students on the 'School History' website.

This project influenced Samantha's work in a number of ways. She discovered new strategies which she and others could use to scaffold students' learning. She also discovered the power of teacher reflection. Samantha has continued to analyse her own practice as she experiments still further in order to contribute to a school-wide effort to raise the profile of learning.

References

Ginnis, P. (2001) *Teacher's Toolkit: Raise Classroom Achievement with Strategies for Every Learner*. Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing. School History website: www.schoolhistory.co.uk

QCA (2005) www.qca.org.uk/14-19/6thform-schools/68