

Shaping an emotionally literate curriculum

Developing a curriculum that focuses on emotional literacy creates a win-win situation for schools as they seek to promote wellbeing as well as achievement – but it can create discomfort for some teachers. **Antidote Directors James Park** and **Marilyn Tew** show how to safely take staff out of their comfort zone to develop emotional literacy skills in their own classrooms

Some hear the words ‘emotional literacy’ being used in relation to the school curriculum as a siren call to lure young people away from the quest for knowledge. Schools, they insist, are there to teach literacy, numeracy, history, science and whatever else, not to indulge young people with such ‘soft’ and ‘touchy-feely’ stuff.

The current shadow schools minister Nick Gibb is a keen exponent of this view. All the problems with education in this country, he argued in a recent House of Commons committee debate, can be ascribed to teachers’ supposed preoccupation with ‘learning to learn’:

The best way to learn how to learn is actually to learn and acquire knowledge – lots of it – while young and able to absorb it. Thinking is about processing information and knowledge. Creative thinking is about people discovering new thoughts and concepts from the knowledge they have. Thinking in a vacuum is just vacuous. (Gibb, 2006)

For decades, many teachers and educational researchers have been arguing that those taking this perspective look at education from the wrong direction. They hold the converse view that, if we can help young people to practise the level of curiosity, creativity and resilience they need to master complex briefs and engage with intellectual challenges, they will acquire all the knowledge they need to function well in the modern world. This is the heart of the argument for a curriculum focused on emotional literacy.

Changing the teaching relationship

What worries some people about a shift towards emotional literacy is that it necessarily involves giving young people some control over the content of what they learn.

You cannot tell young people, for example, that you want them to be critical thinkers who take responsibility for their learning, and then mark them down in a test because their explorations take them away from the particular piece of information someone else thinks they need to know. If the focus is on skills rather than content, you have to give young people some type of ‘freedom to roam’.

The former Conservative MP Michael Portillo perfectly caught the anxiety this notion can generate when he said:

Academic thinking about education downplays the importance of knowledge. It promotes the importance of the child’s learning through experimentation and experience. The gobbledegook of academia can be dangerous. What if these theories don’t work and children simply don’t learn what they need to? Children aren’t adults. They can’t know what they don’t know. They don’t yet have the capacity to choose their own way. Our duty is to raise them from ignorance. (Portillo, 1999)

What such a statement fails to appreciate is how an effective emotional literacy curriculum should give young people the capacity – both individually and collectively – to discover for themselves what they need to know.

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Top tips for restructuring the curriculum to boost emotional literacy

- Incorporate work on emotional literacy into the school’s other priorities, linking it to the school’s vision and values, and broader school improvement
- Audit or survey the school community to find out how people experience the school before the work begins (this provides a baseline, identifying issues and priorities)
- Appoint a key member of the senior leadership team to lead the initiative
- Make time for staff to discuss and reflect on their own social, emotional and behavioural skills
- Provide training for all staff on the emotional and social aspects of learning and the importance of emotional literacy to learning and achievement
- Gradually involve more staff in leading aspects of the programme
- Ensure the school’s behaviour policies support emotionally literate working, with a greater focus on praise, rewards and pupil involvement
- Audit the curriculum to discover where the school is already promoting emotionally literate skills and approaches
- Develop skills, such as cooperation, empathy and resilience across the curriculum by active and participative approaches, groupwork, positive-learning relationships and opportunities to reflect on the emotional impact of lesson content and processes
- Teach additional specific skills that pupils need in PSHE, such as listening, decision-making and risk assessment

Well-managed groupwork needs to be at the heart of an emotional literacy curriculum

By enabling them to explore, reflect and deliberate around a question that they have been asked, or a challenge they have been set, they will find their way to the content they need – so long as they have access to rich sources of information and have adults to act as their guides.

If what they come up with is different from the content that the ‘experts’ would have laid down for them, that is a problem for the experts, and not for society as a whole.

None of this is to deny the importance of young people acquiring knowledge, or in any way to argue for a content-free curriculum. However, the more effective route to knowledge is to lay down broad guidelines about the types of things we want young people to know and then to let them work out with their teachers how they are going to achieve that, rather than drawing up detailed tables of what they need to know at particular stages, focusing on the content rather than on the journey.

Turning tide

Recent developments in policy have created opportunities for schools to restructure their curriculum in such a way that it boosts emotional

literacy. For example, the revised secondary curriculum being introduced into schools from the autumn of this year requires a balance between the pursuit of achievement and the promotion of wellbeing through its aims of enabling all young people to become:

- successful learners
- confident individuals
- responsible citizens.

These aims are closely tied to the ‘Every child matters’ (DfES, 2003) outcomes of enjoying and achieving, staying safe, being healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving economic wellbeing. At the very core of this curriculum is the learner as a confident individual, who leads a safe and healthy life and is able to make a positive contribution to society.

What constitutes wellbeing?

Government documentation does not specifically define ‘wellbeing’ as a global concept. Rather it defines aspects of wellbeing in economic, health, personal and emotional terms.

For the purposes of this article, we draw on

Using SEELS to increase whole-school emotional literacy development

Aspect of school	SEELS dimension	Action for a more emotionally literate school
Ethos and vision	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Revisiting the vision of the school and clarifying aims and purposes
Systems to support roles, responsibilities, skills and achievement	Capable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reviewing job descriptions and appraisal systems to provide better support ■ Increasing opportunities for continuing professional development in the concepts of emotional literacy ■ Ensuring active and participatory learning strategies ■ Reviewing the role of the tutor ■ Making teaching and learning approaches facilitative. ■ Introducing assessment for learning practices and providing greater time for reflection on the processes of learning, using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) (see: www.ellionline.co.uk)
	Listened to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developing practical strategies for building relationships across the school, such as increasing groupwork and active teaching and learning approaches ■ Using circle time ■ Running Philosophy for Children ■ Using peer mediators ■ Providing playleaders in the playground ■ Providing funded time for teaching and non-teaching staff to plan together ■ Improving staffroom facilities and increasing interaction between all staff
	Accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reviewing formal communication systems, such as the virtual learning environment (VLE), including its access and availability for all adults in the school, its use and maintenance ■ Reviewing the time and opportunities for informal communication by thinking through the use and availability of communal spaces, such as the staffroom, and the funded time available for different sections of the school staff to meet, plan and review ■ Introducing strategies for enabling each student to feel genuinely appreciated for their unique talents and skills
	Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enquiring into the parts of the school campus and times of the school day when students feel more or less safe, either physically or emotionally ■ Reviewing the creative use and supervision of all areas of the school grounds and buildings ■ Introducing more ‘getting-to-know-you’ activities to ensure students know all the people with whom they are learning and feel emotionally safer to take risks ■ Creating opportunities to develop a greater sense of connection between students and between adults and students, including off-timetable and off-site activities
Formal and informal communication systems	Included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Looking at the data to find out if any section of the school community is feeling marginalised or undervalued ■ Introducing additional support, such as clubs and alternative places to go for vulnerable groups of pupils ■ Addressing the use of excluding and labelling language – revisiting policies and practices relating to bullying, special educational needs, rewards and sanctions

Antidote's research (see: 'The emotional literacy initiative', *The Antidote*, 17, 2005 found at www.antidote.org.uk/who/newsletter.html) into what enables people, whether young or old, to experience a sense of wellbeing in a school context.

The findings showed that people can learn, adapt, engage, grow and achieve when they feel:

- capable – working in an environment that supports and empowers them to realise their potential
- listened to – heard and heeded in ways that might lead to change
- accepted – for who they really are
- safe – both physically and emotionally because there is an acknowledgement that emotions affect what they think, say and do
- included – with a distinctive role that enables them to feel valued and important to the school for the unique contribution they make.

In an emotionally literate school, this definition of wellbeing should work outwards, from the aims and vision that shape the whole-school ethos, to the content of lessons and the ways in which adults enable students to engage with learning.

Emotionally literate schools have first found out how adults and students experience daily school life using an audit or survey tool, such as the School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS), developed by Antidote. In response to the findings, they have decided where the issues and priorities lie and have developed strategies, systems, processes and skills to support better learning. Examples of work that schools have done are shown in the box on page 46.

Impact of initiatives on emotional literacy and wellbeing

Within the arena of new policy affecting schools today, we find a focus on personalised learning, creativity and critical thinking and the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL). Each of these agendas has the potential to increase a student's sense of wellbeing, by making them feel more capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included (CLASI) in school.

Strategies and activities that promote creative and critical thinking across the curriculum increase young people's ability to problem-solve, make connections between learning at home and at school, and between subjects. The likely outcome is an increased sense of competence, capability and agency in their own lives. The personalised-learning agenda similarly promotes students' sense of agency by using assessment for learning approaches and tailoring teaching and learning strategies to the individual learning needs of each student.

Some people will be cautious about these developments. They will observe that students still have to master a lot of prescribed content to get through their SATs or GCSEs, and that what personalised learning means to lots of people is catch-up classes in literacy and numeracy for those who are seen to be underachieving. However, the current political climate provides the best chance we have had for a long time to show that attention to the social and emotional environment of schools really does have an impact on young people's engagement

with learning and their achievement.

The 2020 *vision report* (DfES, 2007a), sometimes referred to as the Gilbert review, provides some type of blueprint for schools to guide them on this journey. It recognises that the key challenge in educating today's students is to give them the capacity to continually restock their supplies of relevant knowledge and useful skills by learning how to:

- communicate orally
- be resilient in the face of difficulties
- be creative, inventive, enterprising and entrepreneurial
- take responsibility for their own learning.

Arguing that the combined effect of the national curriculum and the assessment system put these skills 'in danger of being neglected by teachers and undervalued by pupils and their parents at a time when they matter more than ever', the report recognised that a personalised learning approach should:

- treat students as partners in their learning
- help students to understand how to learn, as well as how to think creatively, take risks and handle change
- provide choice about how they access their learning so that they can take ownership
- listen to what the students think about the services they receive
- design those services with students in mind.

If the Gilbert review provides a blueprint for action on teaching and learning, Ofsted's evaluation of the pilot of the secondary SEAL programme provides practical evidence of the form that action could take (Ofsted, 2007). Ofsted noted that:

in the schools where the programme was most successful it had begun to influence aspects of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. (Ofsted, 2007)

The schools in the evaluation had addressed the social and emotional aspects of learning in a variety of ways, from the whole-school ethos to teaching skills in personal, social and health education. A distillation of Ofsted's findings is given on box on page 45 as top tips for managers in restructuring the curriculum to boost opportunities for developing emotional literacy and ensuring the wellbeing of all members of the school community.

For advice on how to increase personalisation, creativity and individual learning within the curriculum, see the article on pages 40–44. For details of the impact of the 14–19 review on curriculum restructuring, see the article on pages 24–26. For an overview of what the QCA curriculum review involves, see the article on pages 20–23.

Opening Minds

The RSA Opening Minds project is an example of a practical experiment in shaping a skills-based curriculum in line with the recommendations of the Gilbert review, and giving due attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning.

Opening Minds is most often used in Year 7, with the hope that it will ease pupil transition into secondary school, as well as providing a good preparation for the learning challenges that await them.

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Emotionally literate schools have first found out how adults and students experience daily school life using an audit or survey tool

For the emotional literacy target, each pair rated themselves on a 10-point scale as to how well they had worked cooperatively and then decided on an action they could take next time to improve their performance

Opening Minds 'relating to people' dimension

Students learn how to:

- relate to other people in varying contexts
- operate in teams
- develop other people
- communicate by different means
- manage personal and emotional relationships
- use varying means of managing stress and conflict.

The focus is on developing a range of skills around:

- learning
- citizenship
- relating to people
- managing situations
- managing information.

These skills are normally developed through project work that breaks through the normal subject divides. When a school introduces an Opening Minds curriculum, it typically delivers it using a team of teachers, maybe five or six, from across the traditional disciplines.

The curriculum organisation varies from school to school but, commonly, the learner is placed at the centre of the planning process. A topic of relevance to the students is then selected and the subject specialists bring to the topic their specialist knowledge. In some schools, learners construct their own curriculum map, based on what they would like to know or think they should know about a particular topic.

Staff are invariably astonished at the level of sophistication young people show when they are given the opportunity to help with the planning of their work. Some in the group bring considerable knowledge to any chosen curriculum subject because of their access to the web and their pursuit of other interests outside the context of school.

When the class has pooled its prior knowledge (from primary school or other sources) and then thought about the additional knowledge it would need to acquire, a topic map is created. This results in project-based work, which can form the majority of the curriculum or occupy a set of lessons alongside a more traditional timetable.

The success of Opening Minds is evidenced by the second evaluation (*Opening Minds: giving young people a better chance*, RSA, 2005, see:

www.thersa.org), which points to evidence that: *students not only cover the ground in the subject curriculum and sometimes more, but may have a better understanding of individual subjects than when these were taught discretely.*

The implication of the evaluation is that skills-focused, project-based, student-led learning has the potential to raise levels of achievement and address issues of behaviour.

The Opening Minds curriculum newsletter 5 (available for download from: www.thersa.org/acrobat/curriculumnewsletter5.pdf) notes a 'spectacular difference' in behaviour. Such work also develops the skills of participation, cooperation, critical and creative thinking and problem-solving,

The first of these is that students are more engaged in a learning experience that they have a chance to shape

alongside emotional literacy skills such as resilience, empathy, listening and inclusivity.

Following the successful completion of a three-year pilot study, the schools involved have experienced stunning improvements in student and teacher motivation and solid gains in student performance. The benefits seen include:

- less low-level disruption in the classroom
- more mature students who are motivated and ready to learn
- increased enjoyment of lessons by both students and teachers
- development by teachers of relationships with their classes that are based on trust and negotiation.

There seem to be two key elements to achieving this benefit. The first of these is that students are more engaged in a learning experience that they have a chance to shape. The nature of the work enabled by Opening Minds is characterised by:

- students having more extended contact with fewer teachers
- a sense of equality between teachers and learners
- teachers being more facilitative and less didactic.

The young people who took part said that they valued being involved in their lessons, and appreciated the negotiation that frequently takes place between teacher and pupil about the best way of tackling a particular element of a project.

The second key element in influencing success is that students become more confident when they experience themselves as part of a learning community. Many schools credit the Opening Minds approach with improving relationships across the school. This has a knock-on effect on students' self-confidence.

Teachers from Years 8 and 9 are reported as saying that, when compared with previous cohorts, students who experienced the curriculum displayed more learning readiness, control of their learning and independence.

One Northamptonshire school reported that Year 7 students involved in the programme appeared to settle in much faster and easier, helping them to find confidence and become more independent than other students of the same cohort. Examples of skills that students develop in terms of 'relating to people' are given in the box above left.

Incorporating emotionally literacy in lessons

Skills that can be developed in an emotionally literate curriculum are:

- personal qualities, such as imagination, integrity, independence, recognition and management of emotional states
- motivational skills, such as the ability to control debilitating emotions and harness facilitative emotions
- social skills, such as interdependence, empathy, listening and speaking, cooperation, problem-solving, resolving conflict and the ability to recognise and appropriately respond to emotional states in others.

Engagement leads on to a sense of connection and belonging, which increases our sense of competence and capability and so our sense of wellbeing

Case example: learning about themselves

At Antidote, we once showed a group of secondary teachers a clip of primary school pupils engaging in a philosophical enquiry (see: www.sapere.org.uk) around the question: 'Is Africa a free country?' The pupils selected the question because it was the one, of the many they generated, that interested them most. Exploring the question required them to bring together what they knew from their family experience, watching television, newspapers or exploring the internet so that they could make sense of it.

One of the teachers watching the clip became quite agitated about the failure of the teacher running the session to make students aware that Africa was a continent. In this case, the teacher could not accept that putting the knowledge content first in this way would have been detrimental to the learning these young people were engaged in. Through their deliberations, they did eventually correct the 'mistake' in the question, but that was much less important to them than what they had uncovered about the background to their emotionally charged perceptions about African life and history.

Curriculum essentials

Other research evidence confirms the finding of the Opening Minds project that relationships (students-to-students and adults-to-students) are a major factor in students' capacity to engage with, enjoy and benefit from learning. In the UK, the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory project from the University of Bristol is a case in point (see: www.ellionline.co.uk). Such work suggests that an emotional literacy curriculum that focuses on these relationships provides a valuable springboard for learning. Such a curriculum would provide students with opportunities to:

- make discoveries about who they are and what they might become
- work collaboratively with disparate groups of people
- reflect on themselves as learners, whether they are working individually or in groups.

In reality, these areas are intertwined. People learn about themselves through engaging with others and, in thinking about what happens in their relationships, necessarily reflect on their learning. However, it helps students if they can sometimes attend to each area discretely by taking time to consider a particular aspect of emotional literacy. In some schools, each lesson has a SEAL objective alongside the curriculum objective. At the end of the lesson, the students reflect on how well they achieved each of the objectives, thereby taking time to reflect on a facet of emotional literacy.

In one Year 5 classroom, the lesson objective was to produce a mindmap of a story that students were writing. The SEAL objective was to work cooperatively with their learning buddy. The paired work took place outside the classroom in other parts of the school because the whole-school target was to develop independent and responsible learners. Every day, students were provided with opportunities to work responsibly without direct

Some teachers use open-ended tasks and select one member of each group as an observer – the observer uses an observation sheet to note how each participant takes part in the group task

adult supervision. At the end of the lesson, the class reflected on the two objectives. For the emotional literacy target, each pair rated themselves on a 10-point scale as to how well they had worked cooperatively and then decided on an action they could take next time to improve their performance. The specific skills that can be developed in an emotional literacy curriculum might include the ones outlined in the box at the bottom of page 48.

However, these elements are only a small part of an emotional literacy curriculum. The way in which the whole curriculum is taught, the relationships a student is offered and the school systems that either support or inhibit a sense of connection to the school community are equally important. The process is just as important, and possibly more important, than the content for developing emotional literacy. Strategies for developing emotional literacy in the curriculum are given in the box below.

Learning about themselves

Common sense would tell us that we are more likely to learn when the subject we are learning is experienced as meaningful to us. This applies whether the subject is the English civil war, Jane Austen or quantum mechanics. The advocates of a content-focused curriculum resist the logical outcome of this insight – that the curriculum should provide opportunities for students to make subjects personally meaningful. They fear that it will lead to a preoccupation with the subjective and a stripping out of the content from knowledge. However, an emotionally literate curriculum values people's different subjective responses to an area of knowledge, on the understanding that learning is enriched when students are learning concurrently about themselves and the world around them.

In today's world, we could argue that the amount of unprocessed information that young people carry around with them gets in the way of their learning. We have evidence that some low-level disruption in classrooms is provoked by social anxiety. Students may be so caught up in their unanswered questions about what is going on in the classroom, why teachers adopt particular attitudes, why other students behave as they do, why they experience particular feelings – that they cannot begin to focus on the issues at hand.

Philosophical enquiry is an example of how a teacher can bring together what students feel and what they know – see the case example in the box above left.

Strategies for developing emotional literacy

Some of the things that you can do to help pupils develop emotional literacy are to:

- allow space for silent reflection and thinking time
- help the class to become a functioning group
- offer pupils open questions to pursue together
- enable students to tell each other their stories
- give students as much responsibility as you can to shape their learning
- let them experience their teachers as facilitators of learning as well as transmitters of knowledge.

There is still a place for the subject specialist to teach in a didactic way, so long as it is only part of what students are being offered and that the teaching is genuinely inspiring

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Qualities students equate with being an effective learner

- **Curiosity** – feeling sufficiently secure in oneself to be able to take an interest in things outside oneself – other people’s views, objective reality.
- **Resilience** – the capacity to stick with challenges, enduring the anxiety involved in not knowing the solutions to problems or the answers to questions.
- **Interdependence** – being able to use relationships with others to stimulate one’s thinking and engage one’s resources.
- **Creativity** – having the confidence to draw on one’s intuition in coming up with fresh thinking.

For more information, see: www.ellionline.co.uk

For more information and resources on philosophy for young people, visit the Sapere website: www.sapere.org.uk. See also the article on pages 36–39.

The challenge in a focus on emotional literacy is to find ways of using this type of approach across the curriculum, allowing young people to use what they know about themselves to understand particular subject content, and then to feed back what they learn about subjects into knowledge of themselves. How do I use my own desire to assert myself to understand Napoleon’s hunger for power? How do I use what I have discovered about Napoleon to know myself better?

Learning in groups

People learn about themselves through the interactions that they have with others, so self-knowledge emerges through working in groups. When students work in groups, projects are successfully completed only when pupils have the capacity to draw together different skills, aptitudes and perspectives in a dynamic way. So, well-managed groupwork needs to be at the heart of an emotional literacy curriculum.

Adults tend to understand the power of a group either to facilitate or inhibit effective participation and learning if they reflect on meetings that they attend. When you leave a meeting dispirited and exhausted, the likelihood is that your emotional needs were not addressed. Maybe you felt that the information would have been better given on a piece of paper prior to the meeting, leaving time for genuine discussion; or one of your colleagues may have dominated the proceedings with a strongly held, but minority view. Perhaps the meeting felt pointless because the decision had already been taken before you all met; or, when you bravely decided to say something, you were not listened to.

These are responses we regularly experience when groups get together to complete a task. Only when members of the group have the safety and freedom to reflect on what is going on do they bring to their own attention the various group behaviours of individual members. Self-awareness is the first essential ingredient of development and change, and from it individuals can develop their skills and competencies. Motivational theory says that, when we experience emotional safety, we are enabled to take part in group activity. Engagement leads on to a sense of connection and belonging, which increases our sense of competence and capability and so our sense of wellbeing.

The Social Pedagogic Research in Groupwork (SPRinG) project (see: www.spring-project.org.uk) has highlighted the difference between students working in groups and working as groups. This project highlights the value of effective groupwork, as shown in the box below.

It is the teacher’s job not only to ensure that their students are able to work in groups, but also that they engage with challenging issues. For learners to grow and develop through their work together, they need to be presented with problems that make them think, and have time to reflect on the process of working together. Some teachers use open-ended tasks and select one member of each group as an observer. The observer uses an observation sheet to note how each participant takes part in the group task. At the end of the groupwork, there is time for reflection on how well the group performed. The observer provides accurate feedback, which increases individual and group awareness and provides the basis for developing skills.

Reflecting on learning

When students are provided with opportunities and frameworks for thinking about how they learn – both individually and as a group – it helps them to make good use of all the opportunities available to them. When we take advantage of life opportunities, our sense of being in control of our own destiny increases. We feel more capable and have the feeling that more is possible. This has been called a ‘can-do’ mentality, and it lies at the heart of emotional literacy.

Researchers at the University of Bristol set out to investigate the qualities associated with becoming a good learner. The qualities they highlighted were associated with positive emotional health and included the dimensions outlined in the box above left.

This was the research that produced the ELLI. It is an online questionnaire that asks learners about their learning preferences. Each question is scored on a 1–4 scale where 1 is ‘not at all like me’ and 4 is ‘very like me’. Once the questions are answered, the

Achieving effective groupwork – teacher’s input

- Put time and effort into developing a supportive ethos that allows pupils to reflect on the skills they need to improve their capacity to collaborate with each other
- Spend focused time on developing the skills of listening, explaining and sharing ideas
- Address conflicts and assist pupils in finding ways to resolve the problems inherent in working together
- Stay on the sidelines, encouraging pupils to find their own information and take responsibility for making use of it
- Integrate groupwork into the fabric of the school day
- Ensure that groupwork is adopted by the whole school

computer generates a learning profile that shows strengths and weaknesses in relation to seven dimensions of learning power. The box below right outlines these.

The results of ELLI can be used to stimulate thinking about both individual and class learning, as shown by Ruth Deakin-Crick (2006) in *Learning power in action: a guide for teachers*. The box bottom right gives a case example of how the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory can enhance learning.

Making it work

Adopting an emotional literacy curriculum does not mean that everyone is required to teach in a different way. There is still a place for the subject specialist to teach in a traditional way, so long as it is only part of what students are being offered and the teaching is genuinely inspiring.

Evaluations of emotional literacy work show that, for this type of curriculum to be effective, we need teachers who have the ability to:

- create and sustain positive interpersonal relationships
- honour student voice
- provide students with choice and challenge.

Honouring someone's voice means attending to it, giving it weight and taking it seriously. This is dialogic communication – one characterised by mutual listening and response. Alongside this capacity to make supportive relationships lies the ability to stimulate learners by providing them with choice and challenge in their learning. For learners to grow and develop, they need to be presented with problems that make them think and to have time to reflect on their learning processes, as well as on the subject matter at hand.

Perhaps the main ingredient in making an emotional literacy curriculum work is the excitement it engenders among the teachers involved. As they see the learners change, grow and engage, the teachers become reconnected with their enthusiasm and passion for teaching.

Conversations in the staffroom cease to be about difficult classes, truculent young people and unmanageable behaviour. Instead, staff focus on how new approaches worked and how they could be refined; how differently the students engaged with learning; and how moving it was to gain greater insights into the young people's perceptions of the world they live in. The feelings in the staffroom become more positive. Adults in the school become models of learning and their wellbeing increases, having a further positive effect on the relationships they offer to their students.

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Marilyn and James are the authors of *The emotional literacy pocketbook*, published by Teacher Pocketbooks. For more information about Antidote's work see: www.antidote.org.uk

ELLI's seven dimensions of learning power

- **Growing and learning** – 'I can learn how to learn better over time'
- **Learning relationships** – 'I can learn with and from other people'
- **Strategic awareness** – 'I can plan, resource and actively manage my learning and know how I learn best'
- **Resilience** – 'I can stick at learning and can manage feelings of confusion, not knowing and failure'
- **Creativity** – 'I can take risks, play with ideas and think laterally'
- **Meaning making** – 'I make learning personally meaningful'
- **Critical curiosity** – 'I ask questions to get beneath the surface of things'

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Case example: using ELLI to enhance learning

Antidote was asked to work with a Year 9 class that was underachieving and perceived as difficult to teach. It was clear from observation that, although this class enjoyed being together, students tended to shut out their teachers with high off-task and on-task noise levels, as well as failing to listen to instructions. The only way they could cope was when the teacher set firm boundaries for behaviour and learning. The class's inability to take responsibility for its learning was seen by all the teachers to limit the type of learning experiences that could be offered to the class; in particular, it ruled out any type of groupwork.

We used ELLI to explore what was going on for the class. It showed that it contained a majority of students who saw themselves as good at changing and learning. However, they needed encouragement to become stronger in other dimensions, such as learning relationships and creativity.

Over a number of weeks, the teacher helped the class to understand the concepts and to think about how they could use each of the learning dimensions in the lessons. This class used ongoing group evaluation, based on peer observation, and feedback, as well as plenary discussions, to become aware of the group process and how it affected the learning task.

When we ran the ELLI questionnaire again, it showed a significant increase in learning power, particularly in the class's perception of its learning relationships. In December, only 3.8% of the class had rated themselves highly in this dimension but, by July, this had risen to 24%.