

Shaping a CLASI school

Antidote's development director **Marilyn Tew** describes how schools can encourage learning by promoting 'CLASI-ness'

Antidote's research demonstrated that schools can improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that staff and students feel CLASI – capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included. This is because the experience of feeling CLASI means they:

- have some influence over the delivery of teaching and learning
- can get the support they need, and provide support to others
- are valued for their distinctive contribution to learning leads to rising levels of enthusiasm, engagement and energy across the school community.

Capable

Adults and children feel **capable** when they experience others as affirming their potential and encouraging them to grow. The feedback they receive creates a sense of possibility for them. This connects them to their sense of agency.

Feeling capable – facilitators

- Feedback that promotes growth and 'can do', such as assessment for learning.
- Building positive relationships to support learning.
- Time to complete tasks and reflect on success.
- Creative use of everybody's specific skills.

Feeling capable – blocks

- Intimidating language, tone of voice, or body language.
- The use of a more powerful position to control another.
- Speaking in ways that undermine, belittle, shame or frighten.
- Not believing that every child can achieve.
- Insufficient time to complete tasks and feel satisfied with the result.
- Thinking that the school cannot have a positive impact when the family circumstances are challenging.
- Focusing on behaviour for learning rather than relationships for learning.

Listened to

Adults and children feel **listened to** when the school has open and accessible systems that permit everyone to voice a view, and the attention given to people's views can lead to

things changing for the better. This means that there are ways of hearing all voices: from those of the youngest child to the longest-serving member of staff; from the kitchen staff to parents, governors and other agencies involved with the school. Listening takes place in both formal and informal contexts. It is a feature of classrooms, playgrounds, corridors, offices, staff rooms, car parks and kitchens.

Feeling listened to – facilitators

- Time, space and permission for voicing views and listening to them.
- Time to be calm and to talk about feelings in class.

Feeling listened to – blocks

- A frenzied pace of work.
- A constant sense of pressure.
- No time, space or opportunity for adults or children to be reflective.
- Emotional overload for adults and children.
- Underdeveloped skills in adults and children.
- Listening not highlighted as part of the adult role in school.
- Different philosophies and beliefs about the relationship between children and adults (for instance, a view that adults speak and children listen).

Accepted

Staff and students feel **accepted** when they sense that they can be themselves in the school. They do not have to hide behind masks and roles, but can behave in ways that are consistent with their inner beliefs.

Acceptance brings with it support for the individual to let down their defences and try different ways of being themselves, rather than getting stuck with labels and stereotypes.

Feeling accepted – facilitators

- Remaining open-minded and curious about people and situations.
- A no-blame culture.
- Commitment to avoiding the use of labels.
- Permission to make mistakes.

Feeling accepted – blocks

- People making quick value judgements about one another.

■ People thinking they know what individuals are like and not being curious about them.

- Adults labelling students with many different labels from 'difficult' 'challenging', 'high profile', to 'clever', 'gifted', 'able' and so on.
- Adults labelling other adults as 'cynical', 'enthusiastic', 'weak', 'ineffectual' and so on.
- Classes being stereotyped as 'difficult to teach', 'the class from hell'.
- People speaking to one another without warmth and kindness (adult:adult, adult:student and student:student).
- Rigid discipline structures which take the fun out of adult:student relationships.

Safe

Adults and children feel **safe** when they experience emotional and physical safety in the school. Staff and students feel connected to each other, working to shared goals. They know each other as people. There is a sense of calm across the school buildings, making it comfortable for students and adults as they move around the school.

Feeling safe – facilitators

- Asking students to identify difficult/unsafe areas of school and working to make them safe and supervised.
- A no put-down culture.
- Modelling and teaching appropriate social skills (for conflict, anger, assertive requests).

Feeling safe – blocks

- Insufficient opportunities to get to know the wider staff group so people stay in their smaller team and feel unsafe outside their phase or departmental area.
- Little attention given to group formation in secondary schools after the initial induction in Year 7 (new teaching groups and sets don't know one another and often feel unsafe with one another).
- Areas of the school grounds that are hidden or unsupervised.
- A put-down culture.
- Discipline based on ridicule (naming and shaming).
- A blame culture that doesn't permit mistakes.

- Name calling.
- Bad language used by adults or young people.
- Anger that is inappropriately expressed by adults or young people.

Included

Adults and children feel included when the school communicates that it values each individual and the contribution he or she can make. I know that I bring something unique that is of value and importance (even if my contributions are not *always* experienced as helpful or productive!)

Feeling included – facilitators

- Good support for all groups of the school (SEN, gifted and talented, middle of the road etc).
- A commitment to treat all students fairly without favourites.

Feeling included – blocks

- Particular groups of staff feeling that they get less respect than others.
- Staff feeling that they are divided into cliques.
- Students perceiving teachers to have favourites.
- Adults discussing students when other students can hear (particularly in a derogatory way).
- ‘Throw-away lines’ and jokes that adults make to and about students that make them feel belittled or undervalued.
- Students picking on each other because of differences such as appearance, language, sexual orientation, home background, possessions and so on.
- An ‘anti-boff’ culture.

Shaping a CLASI environment

If a school wants to improve levels of CLASIness, it needs to understand what it is that shapes the emotional experience of staff

and students. There is a tendency in any organisation to try and fix things at a superficial level, because going deeper is experienced as too challenging and time consuming. The result is that time and energy gets wasted.

Suppose, for example, that staff explained their tendency to block every new idea with a ‘yes but’ by saying that they felt frustrated by their inability to make things better. It might be tempting to tackle this by providing training on the power of positive thinking or inclusion. This will not, though, be helpful if the frustration is actually a response to the leadership’s lack of clarity about its educational philosophy, values and vision.

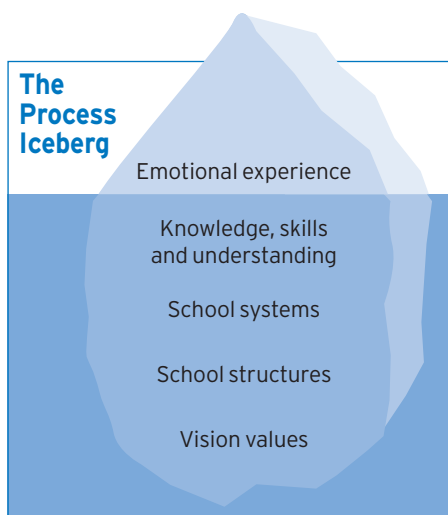
The Process Iceberg

The change consultant Tony Mann uses the model of the Process Iceberg to describe the challenge here. What is visible to the school is the behaviours of staff and students, and the emotional experience that gives rise to them. In order to shift things, we need to go below the level of what is visible to find what needs addressing if change is to happen.

Going to the roots

Schools are swamped in data about the quality of their outputs – how their students progress in their academic learning. If we want to shape emotionally healthy schools where learning flourishes, then we need to focus more intensely on the inputs, the conditions that make learning possible – how CLASI staff and students are feeling. That is what Antidote’s School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS) is designed to make possible.

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 Find out more about the School Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS) at www.antidote.org.uk/offer/seels.html



Under the iceberg - primary

We worked in a primary school where staff reported feeling unsafe. As a result, they chose to ‘hunker down’ in their phase areas, where they did feel safe. The reason for this was partly that the school’s geography did not facilitate cross-phase contact. Also, the structure of the school day reinforced the division. If no other structures had been put in place to counter-balance the divide, it would have remained. The result would have been that the staff would never come to feel like a cohesive, connected team all working together for the children’s growth, learning and development. In this case, the buildings couldn’t be changed. However, addressing the structure of the school day and the way meetings were organised, created time, space and opportunity for adults to meet together regularly as a whole team. This increased the sense of connection and safety.

Under the iceberg - secondary

A large secondary school found that the students felt increasingly disconnected from staff and their peers as they progressed through the school from Year 7 to Year 10. Alongside this, the staff experienced increasing evidence of poor behaviour as the young people grew older. They responded by using tighter discipline techniques and more rigid lesson structures. The emotional experience was not helpful for either party and the school began to look at what could be done to bring about change.

In this case, leadership decided to go as deep under the water as possible and to revisit the vision and values. The focus of the school shifted to one of relationships, caring for one another and learning. As a result, the structure of pastoral and faculty teams was reconsidered, with staff receiving Inset on the systems and skills for relationship building in and out of classrooms.

CLASI	Facilitative systems
Capable	Clear job descriptions and supportive appraisal for adults. Clear, assertive and fair rewards and behavioural consequences.
Listened to	Systems for responding to the views expressed, such as use of intranet. Introduction of mediators for conflict resolution and listening to students. Circle time and quality PSHE for all.
Accepted	Meeting and greeting rituals for tutors and class teachers. Systems for apology and relational repair. Systems for student reintegration after absence.
Safe	Agreed codes of conduct language for adults including use of positive language. A behaviour policy based on rewards for the majority rather than sanctions of the minority.
Included	A strong tutorial system that builds good relationships. Time for staff welfare, recreation and wellbeing.