

## THE POWER TO TRANSFORM

“Emotional literacy is beginning to show encouraging outcomes, and policy-makers are taking these seriously.” DfES special adviser Judy Sebba’s words to our *Emotionally Literate Schools* conference in May raised the spirits of those taking part. They have been confirmed in other ways: the Department has commissioned research on ‘what works in promoting emotional competence’, and how it can be assessed; enquiries have arrived at the Antidote office from units of the Department variously concerned with discipline, curriculum development, PSHE and ‘blue-skies’ thinking.

### TOWARDS EMOTIONAL LITERACY

We will continue responding to this interest by providing information about the benefits that have been achieved from emotional literacy work in schools across the UK. And we will put forward our argument for ensuring that every school in the country is enabled to develop an effective emotional literacy strategy. There are, though, some initial questions the DfES might want to ask itself.

The first of these is provoked by the fragmented nature of this interest. How are these separate units going to shape a collective approach to promoting emotional literacy in schools?

Emotional literacy cannot be packaged up into sets of tools tailored to generating improvement in behaviour, academic achievement or physical health. It describes, instead, an integrated strategy for transforming the quality of relationships in schools, with the potential for knock-on impact across all these target areas.

A less obvious question concerns what ministers and civil servants can do themselves to set the emotionally literate ball rolling. Are they ready to ensure that their own way of communicating - to parents, teachers and pupils - conveys the emotional literacy message? Participants at our *Change is Possible Conference* in January concluded that the most effective way to promote change was to start by showing that one can genuinely listen to, and be influenced by, those whom one is seeking to influence.

### TOWARDS EMOTIONAL LITERACY

In recent years, the DfES has adopted as enthusiastically as any other department a model of public service change that talks about devolution but is reluctant to let go of control. It treats easily found indicators of change with considerable seriousness and apparently holds the view that it is systems rather than people that transform the capacity of organisations to foster learning.

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### CONFERENCE REPORTS

[Emotionally Literate Schools](#)

[Peer Support](#)

#### STORYFINDER

[Tamsyn Imison on Hampstead School](#)

#### BOOKS REVIEWS

[Competence in the Learning Society](#)

[Families and Behaviour](#)

[The Spirited Business](#)

One understands the pressures that drive this model – the political imperative to be seen as ‘tough’ on standards; the anxieties that pervade our culture about whether children will thrive, learn and make a positive contribution to their communities. Antidote’s concern, though, is about the way in which the model leads to declarations and injunctions that demoralise teachers and demotivate students, thus preventing the improvements sought from being achieved.

### BENEFITING SCHOOLS

If the DfES seriously wants to help schools secure the benefits of emotional literacy, it could start by improving its capacity to manage those pressures that provoke attempts to ‘drive’ change through a reluctant system. This would involve working more actively to build the sort of trusting relationships that draw people into working collaboratively, and ensuring that

**Endorsing the Antidote Manifesto** *“The world would be a very different place if people were enabled to develop the emotional literacy they need to bring about the sort of changes that would improve the quality of their own and everybody’s lives.”* **Glenys Kinnock, MEP**

nothing it does gives the impression that it is more interested in young people's performance against targets than in fostering the spark of curiosity that will motivate them to learn.

Engaging in more genuine two-way communication with teaching professionals will enable ministers and civil servants to build bridges between *their* need to generate indicators of improvement and *young people's* natural desire to grow and to learn. Once teachers and students discover that their ideas about how they might improve the quality of their learning can be heard and valued, the potential for improvement in the system will start to be fully realised.

Currently there are signs that the Department, and the government as well, do recognise a need to move away from controlling habits. But we have yet to see any indication that the DfES grasps the challenge of becoming genuinely responsive to what teachers and others are saying about how they can more effectively meet the challenges they face. It is through the quality of its attentiveness to what is happening in schools around the country, and its ability to share what it learns, that the DfES can more effectively help teachers to set their pupils on a sustainable path towards lifelong learning.



We run in-house workshops to help teachers and other staff reflect upon their teaching practice, and how it can more effectively promote emotional literacy in their schools.

Help us put the Antidote message across. We now have posters for you to put up in your school, workplace or community centre. Call the office and let us know how many you require.

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### Emotionally Literate Schools

Michael Fielding, the Chair, opened Antidote's *Emotionally Literate Schools* conference in May by asking whether emotional literacy could do more than provide a band-aid over the dysfunctional elements in the current education system. Judy Sebba for the DfES followed with a question about where we were going to find hard evidence for the Antidote proposition that emotional literacy raises standards.

*Start by ensuring that staff feel valued. Listen to them so that they will listen to the students, and inspire them to achieve. That way students will become confident enough in who they are to be interested in each other.*

The presentations of the following day, delivered by young people and their teachers from five schools – Tuckswold First, Buckingham Middle, Westborough High, Cotham and Lister Community Schools – provided clear answers to both these questions. These were schools where emotional literacy had transformed the culture and climate, with dramatic consequences for young people's ability to learn.

For the most part, the schools were considered to be in serious need of improvement when their current headteachers took over. Sue Eagle described the Tuckswold she joined as a "frightening" place. Sue Benton-Stace talked about how family feuds spilled over into the corridors of Buckingham

Middle. Françoise Leake spoke of mounted police keeping order in the racially-divided playgrounds of Westborough.

Now, though, Westborough is, like Cotham, a secondary school that boasts rising levels of academic achievement. Westborough has the best results of any comprehensive in its area. Between 1992 and 2000, the number of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A\*-C had risen from eight to 39 per cent. A year after writing emotional literacy into its strategic plan, Cotham has reported a dramatic improvement in its exclusion data, attendance figures and academic results. There has been a 12 point improvement in the percentage of students getting five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE (a total of 72.5%) and a nine point improvement in the average point score at A2.

But if it was emotional literacy that led to these improvements, what was the recipe? And if there is no recipe, how can what was achieved in these schools be replicated elsewhere?

#### STARTING WITH RELATIONSHIPS

There may not be a recipe, but there is a paradoxical principle: put relationships before results, and the results will improve. That means ensuring that relationships at every level – management-teacher, teacher-teacher, teacher-parent as well as teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil – are characterised by respect, interest and trust.

How is this done? Françoise Leake emphasised the need to start by ensuring that staff feel valued and supported. If you listen to them, they will listen more attentively to students,

“This project gives staff permission to explore how they can be more creative and stop worrying so much.”  
“If people are being supported and feel part of the team, they engage better with the kids. Lessons improve; exam results get better, so many things.”

Teachers on the benefits of working with Antidote on emotional literacy

## Not Just for Kids with Problems

Antidote organised a conference in the Lake District this March for the Peer Support Forum.

Young people are curious about each other, and need diverse opportunities to understand what happens in their relationships. Peer support schemes are one way of addressing this. A key issue explored at the conference was how such schemes can effectively address all young people’s emotional, social and intellectual development.

### ADDRESSING NEEDS

Participants were interested in how peer support can address the emotional needs of those who do not have specific issues to talk about – a general feeling of distress, perhaps, rather than an incident of bullying to report - and also those who cannot articulate verbally what is making them feel bad.

This led them to reflect on the need for peer support programmes to be embedded in an overall strategy for encouraging students to practise listening and speaking to each other. No scheme can have a significant impact in isolation from other school-based activities that address peer relationships. And an effective scheme will catalyse other initiatives, as teachers become more attuned to the emotional and social needs of young people.

Also discussed was how peer support processes, which are often used to tackle bullying, can provide young people with opportunities to deal with

take their side and inspire them to achieve. In their turn, students will become confident enough in who they are to take a genuine interest in each other, to provide mutual support and collaborate on learning.

Westborough’s Leake made it clear that this was anything but easy and cosy. It was about confronting difficult emotional situations and not tolerating abusive relationships of any sort. “Westborough,” she said, “is a telling school. If there is a problem, it is talked about and dealt with. Things are never allowed to become issues.”

Cotham demonstrated for participants the integrated medley of processes through which it ensures that important ‘telling’ can happen. Internal consultancy helps staff address the factors that block or promote their students’ learning. Peer mediation schemes build a sense of community in the school. A counselling service provides young people with opportunities to address the distress that gets in the way of learning. A schools council is one of several forums giving staff, students and parents a voice. And the visual and performing arts help ensure that feeling and thought, emotion and logic, become partners in curriculum provision.

“We stress,” vice principal Stephanie Quayle explained, “the importance of feeling as a counter to the fear that schools may become too rational, too instrumental, full of accountability, efficient rather than effective.” The vehicle for bringing together feeling and thinking is the evolution of narratives designed to help teachers and pupils make sense of the school’s purpose and how it might be achieved.

“At Cotham,” Quayle said, “we are trying to find the narratives or stories that carry reason, meaning, depth and conviction and explain why we are doing what we are doing.”

### PRIMARY MESSAGES

The messages from the primary schools were very similar. Change had started with activities that brought teachers closer to each other. At Tuckswold, Sue Eagle sought to improve well-being among staff by inviting them to explore the reasons why they came to work. This led over time to a shared statement on values and a policy statement on spiritual development. At Buckingham Middle, a staff circle time opened up the question of how they could develop a school that fostered the person, rather than blindly pursuing academic results.

By giving staff the experience of being listened to, a conversation could develop that more fully addressed the challenge of improving teachers’ and children’s lives. Out of this emerged a diverse series of opportunities for pupils to ask questions, explore different perspectives and articulate their views.

By promoting the quality of relationships, these primary and secondary schools enabled students to take responsibility for their learning, and to find ways of learning from and with each other - by collaborating, challenging and questioning. Through their interactions, they could explore together the conditions that enabled them to learn, and look for ways to bring that about.



We are collecting stories of people's successes and setbacks establishing emotional literacy in different settings. Send them to Antidote, or go to Storyfinder on the website – [www.antidote.org.uk](http://www.antidote.org.uk)

their feelings on a range of other issues.

Schools, it was felt, needed to continuously explore with young people their concerns and preoccupations, and to help peer supporters address them. This should be part of a regular process of reviewing the purpose of any scheme. Often the most effective schemes are those where the pressure to set them up emerged internally, from young people recognising a need and thinking about how that need could be most effectively addressed.

With imagination, people argued, one can set up schemes that enable students to support each other through distressing emotional experiences they are unable to speak about – either because they lack verbal skills, or because the experiences are too raw. Living on farms that had lost livestock during the foot and mouth crisis was the example most often mentioned. People spoke of young people engaging in reflective activities – such as hair braiding – that allow for the development of emotional connection. Peer support, they concluded, need not be just for kids with 'problems', nor just for those needing an opportunity to 'talk'.

## addressing emotional barriers to learning

Antidote supporter Elspeth Morley reports on a conference she attended in Ayrshire.

This conference looked at the Hill's Trust Primary School in the Govan

district of Glasgow, an area that holds as many barriers to learning and social inclusion as one cares to imagine. As headteacher Francis Donaghey and Home-School Community worker Gail Fotheringham described the school, their enjoyment in their work, and respect for their community, was evident as much in their voices as in their material.

They showed video pictures of the school's 'buddies', with their red baseball caps on back to front. A throwaway line revealed that, in a particularly graffiti-plastered part of Glasgow, the school is not vandalised. A map of the playground showed how thinking things through in an empathic way had turned barriers into boundaries. Children can play freely, have a quiet space, skip-rope or play ball games, whatever their choice for the day might be. There are adult volunteers in the playground who provide a variety of needed things, like options for anger management.

Child psychotherapist Jonathan Bradley went on to consider how the fear of being in a complex world can lead to insight being rejected. The illustrations he offered from his experiences with schools connected to the realities of complex 'thinking about it' which we had heard from Hill's Trust. A question began to emerge concerning how difficult it is for teachers to operate in an emotionally literate way when they do not have a clear ethical framework, or any clear emotional support systems.

Before the final open session, Anne MacDonald, who is a consultant forensic psychiatrist, spoke from her experience with very disturbed and

Antidote attended the Labour Party Conference in September to take part in the launch of the Emotional Health Alliance for Children. Other members include the East London Schools Fund, Kid's Company, Chance UK and the National Pyramid Trust.

disturbing people, about their difficulty in retaining the capacity to think. Her manner of speaking conveyed as much as any description of the words spoken. As she discussed the way working in teams across disciplines can keep space open for thinking, she underscored the sense of levels and complexities in emotionally literate work.

The energy in the final session was its own evidence that emotional literacy works. There was space for differences, for feelings, for the rational and the irrational, and for further thought.

### STORYFINDER

## Conversation, Collaboration and Celebration

Tamsyn Imison talks to Harriet Goodman about her 16 years as head of Hampstead School

As Head of Hampstead School in NW London from 1984 to 2000, Tamsyn Imison was widely credited with transforming a struggling institution into a popular school that, as OFSTED put it in March 2000, "provides a good quality of education for the diverse community that it serves."

OFSTED inspectors ascribed much of the credit for the school's improved results to "outstanding leadership and management". When I asked Tamsyn what her approach to leadership had been, she replied that it had little to do with command and control, everything to do with encouraging staff and students to take responsibility for

We run Change is Possible workshops with teams in public service organisations looking to see how they can use emotional literacy to achieve change in the communities with which they work.

You can discover the latest thinking on good practice in peer support, and its relevance to citizenship, at the Peer Support Forum conference being held on 27th November at the Commonwealth Institute in London.

change. “When you are Head, it is not about doing everything. It is about getting things done. Giving people credit and valuing them has the potential to transform what they can achieve.”

#### MAKING IT REAL

When she arrived at the school, Tamsyn looked for an opportunity to demonstrate her approach. “The first thing I did,” she says, “was to sit down and listen to each member of staff.” They revealed a common concern with the state of the buildings. The place was filthy and there was rubbish everywhere. It was an uncontroversial issue that clearly needed to be addressed.

Tamsyn then asked everyone to give her a list of what needed doing in their area. When it turned out that there was a tiny budget for repairs and redecoration, she had to do a lot of things herself. She spent two hours a night cleaning, painting and putting up displays of young people’s work, to establish that standards were important and that she was willing to get her hands dirty to maintain them.

Having demonstrated that she did listen to what people told her, she set about creating further opportunities for people to talk about what mattered to them, and to take responsibility for innovations. Initiating conversations with staff was not easy at first, given the staff’s history of poor relationships with management. Tamsyn took to inviting interested teachers to informal suppers at home and asking them to take on special projects. “What I was really doing was nurturing focus groups with links outside the school.

Then I would back off and let them get on with it.”

One of her strategies for building a collaborative approach into the senior team involved pairing up deputies with assistant heads so that everyone had someone else to talk to in confidence, who would back them up when they were selling new ideas. “People work better in pairs,” Tamsyn argues.

#### SECURING PARTICIPATION

She strove to encourage student participation as well, particularly by giving the student council real responsibility for what happened in the school. She recalls the day when a large group of students sat in the road to show their support for striking teachers. After the deputy head had failed in his attempts to order them inside, Tamsyn went out to check that they were all safe. It was only later that she went to each class to explain her own position. “You are right to express your opinions,” she said. “But you must be democratic. Take it to the school council.” Her aim was to show them that “I was about conversation which is logical. Students expressing themselves is accepted, as long as it is done in an acceptable way. Saying that really changed their views.”

Another important element in the transformation of the school was creative celebration, and the sheer good fun that went with it. “The creative arts,” says Tamsyn, “play a vital role in building a communal feeling. You have a different rapport with your teachers if you have worked together on a project. You can give people opportunities to feel good about themselves and to shine, when for some of them that is

their only chance to do so.”

“One of the most exciting things we did,” she recalls, “was a creative arts day.” The suggestion came from a member of staff. The day involved teachers and students working collaboratively together, taking a whole day off the timetable. As the day approached, concern was expressed that things might fall apart. In the event, the risk paid off in a wonderful esprit de corps.

Also key to change was the work Tamsyn did on involving parents in shaping school policy and in supporting their children’s learning. This was not just a question of consulting parents: she made sure that real changes resulted from their involvement. She encouraged all departments to keep parents informed about what their children were doing in class and to advise them on how they could help. Part of the strategy was to offer them opportunities for experiencing what and how their children were learning.

What, I asked finally, did Tamsyn see as the qualities of a ‘good-enough’ school leader? In her reply, she emphasised enthusiasm, energy and a passion for learning. “You have to care about the youngsters and the staff. People matter. And people have to know where you are coming from. Be prepared to do the dirty jobs. Ultimately, your role is to make people feel safe enough to make mistakes.”

*Dame Tamsyn Imison is now an education strategist and an Honorary Fellow at the Institute of Education, London, where she is doing a doctorate. Tamsyn@sthwold.demon.co.uk*

*It is always misleading to talk about individual competence. The degree to which any individual acts competently in a particular situation emerges, at least in significant part, from his or her interactions with others.*



HE'S SAYING WE HAVE NO HOPE AND NO FUTURE  
BUT WE'RE ALL VERY SKILLED AT COPING WITH THAT

*Tony B*

## antidote news

### The Emotional Literacy Handbook

Thank you to everyone who has responded to the consultation draft of the handbook we sent out in June, or sent in contributions earlier. Your stories and ideas have been very useful in shaping the writing work that is now going on. Watch this space for detailed information on the book's publication in 2003.

### Conferences 2003

A number of people responded to our e-mail inviting suggestions for venues, partners and formats for conferences on emotional literacy in the coming year. We are drawing upon these to shape our programme for next year.

### The Website

Those of you who have visited the website recently may have noticed that no new material has been put up for some time. Apologies for that. We have now overhauled the site completely, and will be refreshing it regularly. But remember, you too can add stories, contribute to a discussion or start one yourself.

### Help Needed in the Antidote Office

Do you ever have some time to spare for Antidote? There are interesting and valuable tasks that need doing in the office: helping us to keep our finger on the pulse of what is happening around the country; ensuring our database and our website are up to date; assisting us in the promotion of what we are doing. If you have time, or specialist skills, contact Susie King at the numbers below.

### Teacher Well-being

Work-life Support is running a series of free seminars around the country on the strategies they have been developing for promoting teacher health and well-being. They are in Wednesfield, Gateshead, Manchester, London and Birmingham. Book by e-mailing [info@worklifesupport.com](mailto:info@worklifesupport.com), telephoning 020 7554 5235 or faxing 020 7554 5239.

## dates for your diary

### 5TH OCTOBER

#### Sustainable Learning - VEC Annual Conference

**speakers:** Professor Bart McGettrick (University of Glasgow), Lesley James (RSA Head of Education), Beverley Ball (Headteacher).

**venue:** The CREATE Centre, Bristol

**enquiries:** Susie King (Antidote) at address below

### 11TH OCTOBER

#### "It never did me any harm ...?" Encouraging Helpful Parenting Practices

Organised by CPHVA, NCMA, the National Early Years Network and NSPCC

**venue:** Commonwealth Conference and Events Centre, London

**enquiries:** [info@profileproductions.co.uk](mailto:info@profileproductions.co.uk)

### 23 - 25TH OCTOBER

#### 4th International Conference on Adolescent Health & Welfare

**venue:** Barbican Centre, London

**enquiries:** [conference@youthsupport.com](mailto:conference@youthsupport.com)

### 28TH OCTOBER & 2/3 NOVEMBER

#### Cynicism vs. Hope: Building a Community of Meaning

Many of us hunger for meaning and purpose in life. Yet we are caught within a situation that leads us to question whether there can be any higher purpose besides material self-interest and number one.

**speaker:** Rabbi Michael Lerner

**enquiries:** 020 7624 1123, [www.spiritmatters.info](http://www.spiritmatters.info)

### 21 NOVEMBER

#### Kidscape Primary Conference

Challenge and Change: Promoting Positive Behaviour for Key Stage 2

**venue:** The Law Society, London

**enquiries:** 020 7730 3300

### 23 NOVEMBER

#### The Effect of Human Interaction on the Actual Hard-Wiring & Chemistry of a Child's Developing Emotional Brain

Organised by the Centre for Child Mental Health

**venue:** London

**enquiries:** Tel: 0117 928 7153

### 25TH NOVEMBER

#### Reform of Public Services: a Cultural Problem?

Are New Labour's ambitious plans for public service reform undermined by today's prevailing culture?

**venue:** RSA London

**enquiries:** 020 7451 6868

### 27TH NOVEMBER

#### Peer Support – Making a Difference

Presentations on good practice in peer support and participation. A National Conference Organised by the Peer Support Forum, with the National Children's Bureau.

**venue:** Commonwealth Institute, London

**enquiries:** 020 7843 1160,

[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

### 9TH DECEMBER

#### Beautiful Minds

A conference organised by the Heads of University Counselling Services, designed to reach beyond student counselling services and bring together academics, medical staff and students who are concerned about student mental health issues.

**speakers:** Dr Geoffrey Copland (VC University of Westminster), Hon Margaret Hodge MP (Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and HE), Mr Peter Wilson (Director of Young Minds)

**venue:** London, WC1

**enquiries:** 020 7040 0179,

[www.beautifulminds.info](http://www.beautifulminds.info)

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