

## SUSTAINING DIALOGUE AT THE TOP

Some commentators tell us that the rivalry between prime minister Tony Blair and his chancellor Gordon Brown is now 'out of control'. Their reports seem to reflect an assumption that, when two men have roughly equal claims to the top of the political tree, the only possible outcome is the vanquishing of one by the other.

### EMOTIONALLY LITERATE OUTCOMES

Is a more emotionally literate outcome really ruled out by the frustration and fury sometimes provoked in each man by the actions of the other? Or could Blair and Brown instead find a way to show they can actually appreciate the other's viewpoints, engage in dialogue about their differences and can work towards strategies that both accept.

The way in which Blair and Brown's reveal their anger with each other sometimes suggests that each feels the need to show he has the power to insist on having things done his way. As if demonstrating a better ability to manage their conflicts would risk giving an impression of weakness.

### HARD WAY

The prevailing assumption is that the electorate considers there to be something 'soft' about the adoption of a non-combative stance. The underlying idea here is a fallacy. As

participants in our recent *Environments for Learning* conference testified (see inside), considerable resilience is needed to sustain an interest in other's people thoughts and feelings, rather than just getting indignant with them for what they do.

But after seven and a half years of living as neighbours in Downing Street, could the Brown-Blair relationship come apart simply because one or the other was worn out by the effort involved in having to work every decision through the dialogic mill?

### HEALTHY POLITICAL PROCESS

What we need is a political process that is built around a real commitment to real dialogue, however demanding it may be. Blair might feel that his life would be considerably easier if he had a free hand to implement his ideas about extending user choice and competition in public services. Brown might be itching for the opportunity to shape policy more clearly around 'values far beyond those of contracts, markets and exchange.' The reality, though, is that the struggle to resolve the tensions between their two position, is necessary to ensure that what results are workable strategies for ensuring that schools, hospitals and other public services are truly responsive to the needs of users, professionals and the wider community.

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### ACCEPTING DEPENDENCY

Blair and Brown need each other; it is their combination that has shaped political leadership in the past decade. Master of detail Brown balances intuitive decision-maker Blair. Brown, the slightly aloof intellectual, complements Blair, the social chameleon capable of finding the right emotional tone for each moment and each individual.

We live, though, in an egotistic culture that is constantly creating heroes and celebrities to knock down and destroy. In such a context it can be hard for a proud individual to acknowledge his dependency on another.

### BROADENING THE DISCUSSION

This, of course, is why we have a constitutional system that recognises the prime minister as only 'first among equals'. It would be refreshing to see that idea shifting the political debate away from the Blair-Brown

**Endorsing an emotionally literate approach to change: "I wanted to do something a bit different than simply empowering the leadership of my school to understand what it meant to be emotionally centred. I thought that I needed to get the institution as a whole to be emotionally centred."**

Martin Buck, headteacher of Lister Community School

psychodrama towards something that reflected a broader and deeper cabinet discussion. A recent article in the *Financial Times* touched on the scale of the problem when it described the perfunctory nature of the conversations around the cabinet table as the 'black hole' at the heart of this government.

#### GETTING STUCK

Ultimately, though, the two men have painted themselves into another sort of hole. If their relationship is central to the effectiveness of the New Labour project, how could Blair possibly hand over power to Brown? To do so in any way other than by simply swapping posts (which nobody seems to be contemplating) would mean the destruction of that relationship.

Whether the two leaders can work out a good answer to the questions at the heart of their relationship would be as good a test as any of whether New Labour can access the level of emotional literacy needed to tackle the issues that really matter – from enhancing the effectiveness of public services, to reconnecting fragmented communities, from ensuring that the EU and US can work together with other countries to tackle global poverty, reduce carbon emissions and reconcile warring factions in various parts of the Middle East.



If your school becomes an organisational member of Antidote, it can use SEELS as a member of the research group. The offer is available only for a limited period. Find out more at [www.antidote.org.uk](http://www.antidote.org.uk)

#### CONFERENCE REPORT

## shaping environments for learning

Antidote ran three conferences during the autumn on how schools can improve their environments for learning. Some 230 participants gathered at venues in Birmingham, Leeds and London to explore: the fresh approaches that have been developed to understand the link between the quality of a school's emotional environment and the capacity of the people in it to teach and learn; the range of new strategies that have evolved to help teachers and managers in making this link; the new enthusiasm of policy-makers for promoting 'personalised learning', 'assessment for learning', and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills (SEBS)

*In the struggle to resolve the tensions between their two positions lies the best prospect of developing workable strategies to ensure that schools, hospitals and other public services are responsive to the needs of everyone*

#### VALUABLE LEARNING

Each conference was built around opportunities for participants to engage in reflective dialogue about their learning during the course of the day. Participants said that this helped them to better understand the value of:

*Silent reflection* – Silence gives people time to think. It allows the mind to focus and relax. Students can rid themselves of the mental clutter they have picked up during the rest of the day.

We are planning a series of conferences and participative events for the autumn of 2005. Let us know what would help your school or other organisations to shape a more effective strategy.

*Talking together* – Hearing the perspectives of others makes it possible for us to clarify our own views and find ways of articulating our feelings. We also start to feel ourselves part of a group. 'When we listen to stories,' said one participant, 'we listen with our own perspective and tune in to that perspective. Different people take different ideas from stories. What we hear depends on the state we are in as we listen. The different questions that emerge are all so interesting.'

*Sharing responsibility* – The group discussion is enriched when everyone can take responsibility for ensuring that they make a constructive contribution. Knowing that others are thinking about the same problem and doing some of the work of solving it makes it easier to share ideas, listen to others views and start working as a team.

*Open process* – If people are being asked to share their ideas and observations, they need to know that they are not going to be judged or derided for what they say. An open process creates the best opportunity for them to learn from observing the ways in which others respond to stories, events or pieces of information.

#### SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Antidote's director James Park described how the organisation's three-year Emotional Literacy Initiative (to be described fully in the next issue of *The Antidote*) has sought to ascertain the conditions that facilitate these processes. He talked about the development of the School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS) as a tool for tracking the extent to which the school environment

One of the critical tasks of leadership in a large organisation is to see resistance and difficulty as a resource for future change. So if there is something inside the system that is making things difficult, it is very important to go and engage with that. Not to say as management 'We don't want to hear that', but to use it as the energy for change.

James Wetz, Environments for Learning conference, 16th November 2004

enabled young people to take the risks associated with learning from and with each other.

He illustrated these findings with some footage of a one-year-old girl playing with a wooden brick trolley. He argued that it was the emotional safety she experienced in the context of the attention she was receiving from her parents that enabled her to become so absorbed in trying to solve the problem she had set for herself - moving the trolley forward by pushing and pulling on its handle. The emotional environment made it possible for her to practise the qualities associated with good learning:

1. Because she feels *capable* of achieving her aspiration, she is able to conceive herself as someone who is *changing and learning, resilient* in the face of setbacks and able to take a *strategic* approach.
2. Knowing that she is *listened to* – those watching her are attentive to her commentary on what she is doing – generates a state of calm that enables her to *make meaning* out of the different aspects of her learning experiences.
3. Being *accepted* for who she is, and allowed to follow her own hunches, she can be *creative* in finding solutions to the problems she had set herself.
4. Feeling *safe* enough to take the risks involved in standing precariously on the brick trolley (because she knows she will be picked up if she falls and is unlikely to be seriously hurt), she is free to follow her own *curiosity*.
5. Her personal absorption in learning emerges out of her sense of being *included* as an important member of the family group. In this way, she acts as an *interdependent* learner.

#### SHAPING ENVIRONMENTS

Marilyn Tew and Roger Sutcliffe used their experience of working respectively with circle time and Philosophy for Children (P4C) to highlight the different strategies that teachers can adopt to create a similarly learning-friendly environment in the classroom.

Marilyn emphasised the importance of structuring young people's experience around a three-stage process that allowed time for:

- \* Connecting emotionally through having a bit of fun together
- \* Reflecting collectively in a safe way
- \* Ending the session so as to put all the difficult issues that have been raised back in their boxes

Roger stressed the importance of teachers seeing themselves as mediators of learning as well as transmitters of knowledge. Enabling students to start constructing knowledge in their own way required an egalitarian structure that empowered people to shape questions for group exploration and play an active part in the discussion.

The power of what can emerge when students learn to agree and disagree in a friendly way was illustrated by some footage of Year 3 children from Gallions Primary School in Beckton engaging in a P4C session around the question, 'Is Africa a free country?'

As the pupils explored their ideas about this, they drew not only on the text that had inspired the question, but also on personal experience and television reports. The level of their emotional engagement with the question reflected the extent to which understanding things better mattered to them. And as they explored their different perspectives and beliefs, they

were being stimulated to learn about each other as well as about geography, anthropology, politics and much else.

#### WORKING THROUGH DISCOMFORT

Their own experience of participating in the conference dialogue alerted some people to the discomfort that can be associated with working in this way. Three areas were identified:

- \* Silence can be scary.
- \* The open-endedness of dialogue does not lead to clear answers or easy conclusions.
- \* Each individual has to develop their own capacity to contribute to the evolving conversation and to take responsibility for the outcomes.

It was hard, said one participant, 'having to listen to everyone, not panic, wait for things to unfold'. Another recognised, though, that the very struggle to deal with 'shared confusion' and 'not having all the answers' can create a bond between people that enables more powerful collaborative work.

#### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

The headteachers who spoke at the conferences talked about their own discomfort from attempting to embed emotional literacy in the school culture.

'I wanted,' said Martin Buck of the early stages in Lister Community School's work with Antidote, 'to say to the staff at my school, 'We are going to grab this thing and we are going to examine ourselves as an emotionally literate school, but I thought they might laugh at me.'

Martin recalled that receiving Antidote's report on the findings from the first survey at the school was

'painful'. Communication was not that good, relationships wavered in crises and the organisational processes were not as good as he had thought they were. But they were also empowering because they made change possible. Out of them emerged a series of models for transforming the school's emotional environment.

James Wetz, former principal of Cotham Community School in Bristol, also spoke about the need to face what was really going on in the school. He had set in motion a process that invited people to say what they really thought of his leadership. Other were sceptical about whether he really wanted an honest response. He, though, was convinced that it was better to face it. 'Being open,' he said, 'made it possible for us to frame our energies and then to look back at where we had been able as a staff group to improve things in key areas.'

#### CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

While the focus of the conference was on the need for whole-school strategies to change a school-environment, the discussions also gave rise to the following principles for shaping an emotionally literate classroom:

1. Allow space for silent reflection and thinking time
2. Help the class to become a functioning group
3. Offer children open questions to pursue
4. Enable students to tell each other their stories
5. Encourage students to place themselves in the stories they are reading
6. Ensure that each student's

Tell the story of emotional literacy in your school for the readers of Emotional Literacy Update. What successes have you enjoyed? What problems have you encountered. Contact [james@optimuspub.co.uk](mailto:james@optimuspub.co.uk)

personal story is heard somewhere

7. Give students as much responsibility as you can to shape their own learning
8. See yourself as a facilitator of learning as well as a transmitter of knowledge
9. Acknowledge when your own emotional experience mirrors that of your students
10. Practise dialogue with your colleagues

#### COMMENTS

*'It was useful to see how other people have initiated or implemented change. You walked the talk. Excellent!'*

*'I have learned a great deal and picked up lots of ideas to cascade and facilitate.'*

*'I particularly enjoyed being with like-minded people who were passionate about why they were here.'*

*'There were some fantastic ideas from the audience as well as the speakers.'*

*'I have been encouraged and enlightened by the breadth and diversity of what was on offer.'*

*'It will give me valuable opportunities to augment what has already taken place at the school.'*

*'As a result of the conference, I will be much more confident about taking on board criticism and comment about my style of teaching and organisation.'*



Come and hear the full story of Antidote's Emotional Literacy Initiative from the heads, teachers and students involved. See back page for details of our conference on the 8th April.

#### INTERNATIONAL REPORT

### EL buds appear in Oz

Antidote has been acting as advisor to a new organisation set up to bring together those interested in developing emotional literacy across Australia and the Pacific Region.

Emotional Literacy Australia aims to 'raise the importance of addressing emotional and social understanding and competencies – in schools, communities, organizations, families and government.'

It recognises that 'many of the issues facing Australia have their roots in poor relationships, the harmful expression or management of feelings, un-supportive environments, lack of empathic understanding and denial of agency, leaving people feeling powerless.'

Emotional Literacy Australia focuses on the importance of: collaborating to promote inclusive well being; pro-actively addressing underlying issues rather than reacting to and 'treating' symptoms of distress; focusing on the humanity we all share, respecting difference and valuing diversity

Among those involved in setting up Emotional Literacy Australia are Sue Roffey, who worked with Antidote until her departure for Sydney in 2000, and Liz James, Deputy Principal at Rutherford Public School, who took part in Antidote's Whole-School Emotional Literacy Conference.

For more information, go to [www.emotionalliteracyaustralia.com](http://www.emotionalliteracyaustralia.com)

How can we shape an education system that really promotes young people's emotional health and well-being? Send your thoughts on the argument for early-enough intervention (pages 6-7) to [emotional.literacy@antidote.org.uk](mailto:emotional.literacy@antidote.org.uk)

Did you know that Antidote members can subscribe to *Emotional Literacy Update* for the special price of £75. Receive the latest news and ideas on emotional literacy on schools every month.

## PROJECT REPORT

# leaving with qualifications

Antidote is collaborating in a research and design project - the Bristol Education Initiative - which has been set up to develop models of provision that will reduce the number of students leaving Bristol secondary schools at the age of 16 without any formal qualifications. Last year, there were 300 such students. This is almost twice the average for England.

The other collaborators in the project, which is being supported by Bristol West, are Bristol LEA, the Graduate School of Education at Bristol University, Human Scale Education and Connexions.

### SOURCE OF IDEA

The project is being led by James Wetz, who was principal of Cotham from 1997 until the summer of 2004. He has been advising Antidote on the development of the Emotional Literacy Initiative (ELI).

James says that, in his 16 years of leading and managing large secondary schools, he became increasingly aware of the school system's inability to meet the needs of a small but important group of students who were not engaged in learning.

Although this group are typically described as 'disaffected', James sees them as young people whose early developmental needs has not been met. This has left them with levels of

frustration and anger that make it impossible for them to learn.

### DISENGAGED FROM LEARNING

The profile of these students at secondary school often shows poor participation, significant under-achievement, low attendance, multiple fixed term exclusions, sometimes permanent exclusions. They may be enrolled as students in their schools, but they are not engaged in positive learning, and often disrupt the learning of others.

The lack of allegiance and commitment to education by these students creates challenges that, at times, temporarily destabilise school communities.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

The research will try to answer the question of how to devise a secondary school system that can 'hold' these children. It will then design and implement provision to address their needs.

The Initiative has three core objectives:

- \* To build intelligence about the reasons why so many students are leaving Bristol schools without formal qualifications. What do we know about the characteristics and backgrounds of these students? If they are students whose early developmental needs have not been met, and who have poor attachment experience, how should the school system be designed to support their needs in an inclusive setting?
- \* To share understanding about best international and national practice
- \* To design provision that can be

implemented in Bristol. What new approaches could arise out of joint discussion by Education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Social Services?

### PROCESS

The research element (January - July 2005) will be a pilot study looking at the characteristics of the students who left Bristol secondary schools without any formal qualifications in the summer of 2004. It will involve the development of in-depth narratives about their education with a representative sample of these students. The project will also carry out a number of field visits to observe best practice nationally and internationally. This pilot study could form the basis of a more extensive research programme in January 2006.

The design element (April - October 2005) will be based on the findings from the research and will be developed through a series of invitation seminars looking at:

- \* The cutting edge practice being developed by school reform groups, particularly the Coalition of Essential Schools in the US. What can we learn from the principles on which these schools have been set up?
- \* Research into emotionally literate learning environments
- \* The impact of recent developments in neuroscience, linked to early attachment theory and the impact on students' ability to engage positively with learning
- \* Findings from the research pilot study

## when is early intervention early enough?

A group of organisations involved in promoting emotional health and well-being met in December to discuss a strategy for working proactively to promote the emotional health and well-being of children and young people.

The discussion took place in the context of the publication of *Change for Children*, which breaks down each of the five outcomes that children and young people said were key to well-being in childhood and later life into five specific aims. Emotional literacy is essential to at least one aim under each outcome.

Specifically, *Change for Children* specifies that services in England should work to ensure that children:

- \* are mentally and emotionally healthy
- \* achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation
- \* develop positive relationships, self-confidence and the ability to successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges

The organisations represented at the meeting were Antidote, Counselling for Children and Young People (a division of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy), the NSPCC, School-Home Support, the National Pyramid Trust, HITS, the Mental Health Foundation and Positive Play.

### INTRODUCTION

Participants argued that, if children and young people were to achieve, participate and be healthy, they needed first to experience emotional health and well-being. Every education, health or social service organisation, therefore, had a part to play in promoting the emotional health and well-being of children and young people.

Although there is a growing

awareness of the importance of emotional health and well-being to all the other objectives set for children's service, there is still a gap in understanding how to:

- \* identify children and young people's emotional needs
- \* respond effectively to those needs
- \* sustain the benefits achieved

### IDENTIFYING EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Currently, too much early intervention arrives much too late – when the emotional needs of children and young people have become complex, so that it takes considerable time and money to address them.

Intervention, participants argued, will only be early enough when the principles of emotional health promotion are embedded in the ethos of all those organisations that impact upon the lives of children and young people.

Assessment tools should be there to catch what has been missed. Currently, they are often used to initiate a process of addressing emotional needs that have a long history.

Children and young people develop emotional health and well-being through a life-long process of using relationships with people who care about them to 'build their self-confidence and ability to successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges'.

An effective strategy for promoting the emotional health and well-being of children and young people needs to:

- \* build in them the resilience they need to negotiate difficult experiences
- \* tackle problems as they arise and before they become complex
- \* strengthen the capacity of communities to promote emotional health and well-being

The strategies most likely to achieve these aims will:

- \* ensure that the environments in

which children find themselves – at school and at home – foster each child's capacity to develop positive relationships

- \* provide active help to all children, at their level of need, in building their capacity to develop positive relationships

*Ensuring that the environments in which children find themselves – at school and at home – foster each child's capacity to develop positive relationships*

To be successful in promoting emotional health and well-being, organisations working with children need to fully take on board the implications of evidence that they cannot promote achievement, health or behaviour without a comprehensive programme of attention to emotional health and well-being.

The implications of this are that:

- \* all teachers and other staff in these organisations need to actively cultivate the knowledge and skills necessary if they are to recognise and respond to the ongoing emotional health needs of children and young people. That means working to ensure that everything they say and do is done with awareness of its impact on the capacity of each child and young person to experience himself or herself as someone who is genuinely respected and valued.

\* continuous attention needs to be given to discovering how far staff and students in those organisations feel themselves to be capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included, and to acting upon these findings

- \* work needs to be carried out across the home-school interface to help foster family environments that also generate in young people the feeling that they are capable, listened to, accepted, safe and included

*Currently, too much early intervention arrives much too late - when the emotional needs of children and young people have become complex, so that it takes considerable time and money to address them*

*Providing active help to children and carers, at their specific level of need, in building their capacity to develop positive relationships*

There are some children whose experience of family life equips them fully to use relationships with people who care about them to 'build their self-confidence and ability to successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges'. But even these children will benefit from the availability of opportunities to build their emotional and social skills.

These essential elements in a comprehensive service to build children's capacity to develop positive relationships are:

- \* facilitated conversations about the emotional aspects of relationships, taking place in small and large groups within the classroom
- \* nurturing group sessions outside the classroom for those children and young people who cannot easily benefit from this form of mainstream emotional work
- \* one-to-one mentoring and therapeutic support for children and young people who are more deeply troubled
- \* safe refuges outside school for children and young people who are deeply disaffected and lacking in parental support

If children and young people are to find the level of provision they need at the time when they need it, these services need to be universally available and there need to be in place:

- \* educational processes that acquaint people with the services available alongside enabling them to see that all of us have emotional needs
- \* strong guarantees that these services are entirely safe
- \* self-referral and assisted referral systems that enable children and young people to make choices and feel in control
- \* flexibility so that individuals can experience services being shaped around their needs .

**SUSTAINING THE BENEFITS ACHIEVED**

The most effective ways of sustaining the benefits achieved are by

- \* making available multiple opportunities for children, in their communities, to build and deepen their relationships with each other and with adults
- \* paying continuous attention to the emotional literacy of organisations and the emotional literacy of individuals within those organisations

*An emotional health promoting school provides opportunities for:*

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO:**

- \* talk about their problems to someone who will listen
- \* be treated as an individual with their own story to tell
- \* have their life stories held by at least one adult in the school
- \* have meaningful conversations with fellow pupils
- \* make use of effective befriending schemes and conflict mediation systems
- \* find their way to the services they need when they need them
- \* relax in friendship corners, quiet rooms, magic places or places to be
- \* experience a sense of calm in the classroom
- \* play and move through spaces outside the classroom that are safe
- \* take part in events that celebrate relationships in the school
- \* celebrate the whole range of their achievements

**ALL STAFF TO:**

- \* have meaningful conversations with colleagues
- \* receive support from colleagues and from professionals
- \* relax in a staffroom which has a positive atmosphere

**TAS AND DINNER STAFF TO:**

- \* have opportunities to be listened to by teaching staff

**PARENTS TO:**

- \* be valued as their children's prime educator
- \* be engaged in dialogue with other parents and the school

**THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL TO:**

- \* have its emotional climate monitored and attended to
- \* form as a whole community

*Antidote would like to thank the Potential Trust for funding the 24-hour meeting of the Emotional Health Alliance that produced the above set of ideas*



## reasons for supporting antidote

Antidote develops innovative strategies for improving the emotional environment in organisations, so that people can operate more happily and effectively within them. These strategies are shared with others through conferences and publications as well as training and consultancy.

Support Antidote and you will be part of an organisation that generates fresh thinking about how to improve the effectiveness of our organisations and the quality of life in society.

**We keep you informed and involved through:**

- \* Our newsletter with information about what Antidote is doing.
- \* Our e-mail bulletin with the latest developments across the UK and abroad
- \* Reduced rates for Antidote's conferences and *Emotional Literacy Update*
- \* Opportunities to join the research group using our School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS)



## website discussion

A recent discussion on the Antidote website gathered ideas about what people meant when they referred to the importance of an emotional literacy strategy being 'whole-school'.

The initial post suggested that the most usable definition would be one that involved 'ensuring genuine attention to what is going on emotionally across the whole school, and that action is taken as a result.'

### UNIVERSAL

Tim Morgan responded well to the idea of emotionally literacy addressing the needs of everyone in the school community: pupils, teachers, parents, non-teaching staff.

'This,' he wrote, 'is essential with the implementation of workforce reform and remodelling. It will involve lots of changes in school life and culture, potentially creating a lot of emotional difficulty. How schools deal with these changes will provide a great benchmark for the level of their emotional intelligence.'

### COMMUNITY APPROACH

Mike Holbrook, a youth worker in a secondary school, suggested that it is important to encourage a 'community approach' which addressed any lack of interpersonal skills in parents as well as their children.

### SUCCESSFUL LEARNING

Richard Marshall, coordinator of the Blackpool Emotional Literacy Project, said that a whole-school approach 'must begin with an understanding of how emotional literacy is a prerequisite to successful learning.'

'Underpinning all the practical experiences must be an ethos based on values that every child matters and that everyone within the school has a role to play in ensuring the school is a safe, enjoyable and motivating place to be.'

*Teaching staff cannot be enjoying their days spent 'managing' behaviour problems rather than delivering lessons to children who want to learn.*

Richard Marshall, Blackpool EL Project

## date for your diary

8TH APRIL 2005

### East London Emotional Literacy Conference

**speakers:** James Park (Antidote director), Martin Buck (head of Lister Community School), Bernadette Thompson (head of Gallions Primary School), Harriet Goodman (Antidote), Anne Murray (Antidote), other staff and students from Lister and Gallions

**venue:** East London Childcare Institute  
9.00am – 4.30pm

**enquiries to :** Antidote (see below)

Four years ago, Harriet Goodman joined Antidote as Education Project Director. Her brief was to develop a project which would demonstrate how a whole-school emotional literacy programme could improve young people's learning, well-being and sense of community.

She found two brave headteachers in the London Borough of Newham who wanted to explore how they could use an understanding of emotional literacy to enhance the school's environment for learning.

The plan that Antidote's newly appointed education project director Harriet Goodman outlined to Martin Buck at Lister Community School and Bernadette Thompson at Gallions Primary was necessarily short on specifics. She was going to start by investigating with staff and students what factors in the school's emotional environment influenced their capacity to relate, to communicate and to learn, then develop through conversations with them a rolling programme to tackle the issues that came up.

The programme featured work around many of the processes associated with emotional literacy - staff communication and reflection, peer mediation and participation, student interaction and community of enquiry. What made it unique was the presence of Harriet as a trusted 'critical friend' of

senior managers and staff at all levels in each school, helping them develop ways of reflecting together and of engaging young people more actively in learning and decision-making. The aim of her approach was to make links between everything that was already going on at every level of the school community and to look for ways of enhancing it.

An interim evaluation conducted in July 2003 found evidence that Antidote's work in Gallions facilitated better communication and an openness to change amongst staff. This led to teachers being able to develop more effective strategies for enabling children and young people to:

- \* listen to each other, respond without arguing and work in teams
- \* allow quieter students to become engaged with their peers
- \* cross language barriers
- \* achieve higher levels of concentration and thinking

At Lister, there was evidence that Antidote's work enabled:

- \* teachers to understand students and empower each other
- \* students to shift entrenched behaviours
- \* the school to promote a safe and open environment where people feel valued and able to flourish.

The conference will be an opportunity to hear from teachers and students, as well as members of the Antidote team, about how the project has affected their capacity to learn and to grow. Participants will be invited to think about how they could do something similar, but different, in your own school.

The conference is aimed at anyone with a strategic role in promoting emotional literacy within a primary or secondary school.

*You can download an application form, or book directly for the conference from Antidote's website [www.antidote.org.uk](http://www.antidote.org.uk)*

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