

THE EMOTIONAL LITERACY INITIATIVE

A discussion at Antidote's *The Fourth R* conference in the spring of 1998 showed that, while interest in emotional literacy was growing, little was known about how the various processes that might promote it could be integrated so as to achieve a cumulative and sustainable impact on a school's environment for learning.

This led Antidote's director James Park to start setting up a project that would involve the organisation working collaboratively with a small group of schools to:

- demonstrate how emotional literacy could enhance learning and well-being;
- generate models and strategies for promoting emotional literacy that could be used by schools across the country.

Three years later, Antidote's newly-appointed project director Harriet Goodman began talking with two headteachers in the London Borough of Newham about joining the Emotional Literacy Initiative. Funding for the project was provided by the AIM Foundation, Tudor Trust, Bridge House Trust and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Below, Harriet describes how the initiative evolved at Lister and Gallions, and what school improvement models have been emerging through the work.

a tale of two schools

When I first started discussing the initiative with Martin Buck, head of Lister Community School in Plaistow, and Bernadette Thompson, head of Gallions Primary in Beckton, none of us knew quite where it would lead. But we knew that we had three years to work with the rhythm of each school.

This made it possible for us to nurture growth from within rather than impose models conceived elsewhere. As Martin said at the time, that was a rare gift. He shared our conviction that meaningful change within an organisation needs to emerge organically in response to people's needs and the opportunities available.

Looking back, I see what evolved as a story in three chapters, each covering roughly a year of the project. The work at each school unfolded with differences in pace and shape that reflect the different realities of primary and secondary education.

By the summer of 2004 we had a sense of real achievement at Gallions, whereas the most promising work at Lister was still gathering momentum. Fortunately, the DfES Innovations Unit agreed to fund an extension to the Lister project through the spring of 2005. Gallions found another way of continuing their story, by co-opting me as a school governor.

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YEAR 1 - CHARTING THE TERRITORY

We started the project by exploring what was really going on for staff and students in the two schools. We particularly wanted to know how their emotional experience was affecting the way they related to each other. Was it enabling them to identify blocks to learning, teaching and working collaboratively?

Underlying the project design were two hypotheses:

- Emotional literacy is not a fixed capacity but an ongoing process of engaging with others and seeking to understand the emotions in play.
- Our capacity to practise emotional literacy varies according to the organisational and social context in which we are operating.

With this in mind, we carried out a wide-ranging survey of staff and students, using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Our researcher Alice Haddon drew out the patterns in the

Endorsing emotional literacy: "Behaviour is significantly better in settings which have a strong sense of community ...A school's ethos provides the context within which children feel secure, know they are valued as individuals, are safe from emotional and physical harm and are able to discuss their interests and voice their fears in a supportive atmosphere."

Managing challenging behaviour, Ofsted, HMI 2363

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The thinking behind Initiative is described in *Antidote's Emotional Literacy Handbook*, published by Fulton and described by one reviewer as 'visionary' and 'filled with positive possibilities'.

data to show that people's *emotional experience* is significantly affected by the quality of their *relationships* at school. The quality of relationships—between students, between students and staff, between staff colleagues, and between staff and management—is in turn shaped by prevailing modes of *communication* and by *organisational systems and structures*. Working with colleagues at the University of Bristol's Graduate School of Education, Antidote used this 'CORE' framework to develop the School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS). This is now a validated instrument available online to assess the extent to which staff and students feel:

Capable – other people are genuinely interested in enabling them to realise their potential

Listened to – they are free to say what they think or feel and, in so doing, may bring about change

Accepted – they are allowed to explore different ways of being themselves

Safe –it is acknowledged that their emotions have an impact on what they think, say and do

Included - they can find a distinctive role for themselves and this gives them a sense of having value

In January 2002, I brought the initial findings back to the leadership teams in each school. At Lister, I happened to make my presentation alongside an adviser from Investors in People (IIP). Staff commitment to their work at the school came across clearly in both reports, but people had been more open with us about their more difficult feelings. Martin remembers it as a

'painful' experience. What struck him and other members of the senior team were the quotes from colleagues who felt insufficiently consulted or appreciated. As then deputy head Lesley Day suggested, 'It's as if people were talking to IIP as professionals, and to Antidote as persons.' Martin replied: 'What we need to do is to help people fuse the personal and the professional.'

At Gallions too the initial focus was on staff issues. It seemed that colleagues first needed to make sense of their own relationships before they could address what was going on for students. Because the staff team was so much smaller than at Lister, we were able to discuss the findings directly with teachers, learning assistants and office staff.

By Easter, the teaching team had sketched out a new organisational structure. This included giving key stage co-ordinators responsibility for improving communication and strengthening management support. Both Bernadette and her deputy Emma McCarthy are convinced that the opportunity to think things through with us gave people a sense of permission. This encouraged them to talk more openly and to come forward with their own ideas.

YEAR 2 - PILOTING NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Because of the time it took for staff to make sense of the survey, our work with students did not really begin until the

autumn of the second year. At Gallions we supported the teaching team as they formulated a strategic plan to introduce philosophical enquiry in the classroom and set up a peer mediation scheme for lunch and breaktimes. What happened in practice was less even-handed. Philosophical enquiry increasingly took centre stage while peer mediation struggled in the wings, particularly after the staff lead for the project, learning mentor Pam Williamson, suffered a serious car crash that kept her out of school for two months.

The work at Lister evolved more serendipitously, growing in and through relationships with individual colleagues.

Naomi Bourne, director of studies for the year 9 cohort, asked for help with a particularly 'difficult' tutor group. Anne Murray, our training & consultancy director, engaged the students and their teachers in a community-building cycle of observation, reflection, intervention and more reflection.

Anne and Naomi also worked with the year 9 Behaviour Group, a student-initiated group that moved from tackling complaints to researching the meaning of disruptive behaviour.

Meanwhile, I linked up with assistant head Jill Geddes, supporting her efforts with the student council and the school's two peer mentoring schemes.

Space for staff reflection opened up after a workshop that Anne and I

There are signs that we are reaching a 'tipping point', making possible more sustained work. The key to making that happen has been the ability to weave together a web of supportive relationships.

“The institution as a whole has grown in maturity. SEELS has provided valuable insight into staff and student feelings, revealing how school structures and practices affect relationships, and why there is a need for warmer and more open communication in all areas of school life.”

Martin Buck, head of Lister Community School

offered on a staff training day evolved into a voluntary group meeting to discuss the emotions of learning and teaching.

YEARS 3-4 - IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABILITY

By the third year of our work at Gallions we were beginning to see real change across the school.

Philosophy remained the flagship programme, included in the weekly timetable for all classes in years 1 to 6. Five teachers undertook advanced training in facilitating enquiry, and two went on to qualify as coaches so that they would be able to support new members of staff. We produced *Thinking Together*, a video demonstrating how the work at Gallions had developed verbal reasoning, promoted emotional awareness, and fostered a real sense of community.

Peer mediation slowly gained status in the school, with an established cycle of training, team meetings, duty rotas and badges of office.

I operated as a ‘listening post’ for staff, keeping in touch with colleagues across the school and surfacing issues that needed to be addressed. This was mostly informal, but sometimes there were opportunities for more structured discussion.

At Lister, we had planned to use the staff training day in November 2003 to share ideas and agree next steps across the school. Then Ofsted announced an inspection (leading to a good report). Colleagues threw themselves into pre-inspection planning, leaving us to continue work on a case-by-case basis.

Anne was asked to work with

another class, supporting their newly-qualified English teacher in an approach that became our model for promoting effective learning in class groups.

Charles Snyman, who had taken part in Anne’s work with the first ‘difficult’ class, drew on her ideas to create an innovative programme for his year 7 tutor group.

When Jill Geddes asked for help in developing more reflective discussion in PSHE, I took her to see a year 6 enquiry at Gallions. Together we piloted the approach with a challenging year 10 class.

Our focus in the fourth year at Lister has been on reflective conversation in the classroom. Working at the heart of learning and teaching seems the surest route to engaging people across the school.

Anne has been working with subject teachers on how they can introduce into the classroom a language that is about learning to learn and also encourage students to become more resilient and independent learners. The teachers involved are keen to introduce concepts such as dialogue and reflection as an integral element in departmental schemes of work.

Charles has been sharing his model for developing tutor groups as learning communities across the year 8 tutor team.

Jill and I have taken a cautious approach to introducing philosophy, seeking to engage interested teachers rather than imposing the method.

The Social Inclusion Faculty has adopted Anne’s model for observing and thoughtfully engaging particularly ‘difficult’ classes.

There are signs that we are reaching a ‘tipping point’, making possible more sustained work across teams and departments. The key to making this happen has been the way we have been able to weave together a web of supportive relationships. This is never an easy task in a large secondary school, but it becomes possible when time is put aside to enable the building of mutual trust.

our guiding principles

1. Start by exploring what things really feel like for the people in place, taking time to understand what is working well, and what seems to be causing difficulty.
2. Seek out the empathy and creativity within the school, and find ways to build on existing work, rather than diverting energy to an entirely new initiative.
3. Collaborate with staff and students to develop new ways of working in response to their interests and needs.
4. Use every opportunity for ongoing reflection with leadership, staff and students, evaluating and celebrating the work as it evolves.
5. Ask and keep asking: What’s going on here? What does it feel like? What might make it feel better?

the models emerging

The work we have carried out over the past four years has strengthened our conviction that a small change across the whole of an organisation is more powerful than a big change in one part of it. If you want to achieve a sustainable shift in the quality of a school's environment for learning, then attention needs to be given to each level of the school community – senior management, staff and students.

It is when all members of the school community have opportunities to reflect together on what is going on for them emotionally that they can start to unlock the blocks to change. Their participation in shaping the process of change helps to ensure that the strategies adopted have wide support across the school community. Approaching things in this way, we have evolved a parallel set of models in each school.

PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND ENQUIRY

Gallions was set up with a commitment to pioneering an innovative approach to learning and teaching through the expressive arts. Yet in our first year at the school, staff told us that the children seemed to rely on adults to stimulate their learning and manage their behaviour. They also expressed concern about children's speaking, listening and thinking skills. We suggested that one way of tackling both issues would be through introducing philosophical enquiry, often known as P4C, or Philosophy for Children.

In a philosophical enquiry, children sit in a circle, raising questions and

Our *Thinking Together* video on using philosophy to promote whole-school emotional literacy can be obtained from Smallwood Publishing, 01304 226900, www.smallwood.co.uk

developing lines of enquiry in response to a story, a picture, a piece of music or some other stimulus brought by the teacher or a child. Bernadette urged each teacher to facilitate an hour's enquiry every week.

Lisa Naylor, now KS2 co-ordinator, was amazed at the transformation in her very challenging year 4 group. 'Within a few months of doing philosophy, their ability to listen and respond improved almost beyond belief. There was a more co-operative feel to the class. Empathy was regularly displayed both in the classroom and the playground. The children showed clear development as critical thinkers too. At the end of the year they worked together, with no adult involvement, to write and act a play to show to the school.'

Nathalie Allexant, an advanced skills teacher and drama co-ordinator, started philosophy in year 3 and is now developing the approach in year 1. 'It's had a tremendous effect in strengthening and deepening the relationship I have with my class. In philosophy, we all come as equals and with the shared understanding that what we say will be listened to and valued. As one child who has significant difficulties in reading and writing explained, "Philosophy helps me join up the jigsaw in my head." To me, it's such a simple way of getting children to listen and respect each other and to really share their identity and what they believe in.'

At Lister, Jill Geddes has piloted philosophical enquiry in PSHE with a year 10 class and has had excellent feedback from the students involved. Next year she plans to offer P4C

"The most important thing this project did was to open up communication across the team. Having Antidote in was one of the best things we ever did."

Bernadette Thompson, head of Gallions Primary School

training to everyone in the PSHE team.

UNDERSTANDING DISAFFECTION

Our work with students at Lister began when the head of year 9 asked for help with a particularly challenging tutor group. My colleague Anne Murray, an educational therapist and advisory teacher on behaviour, followed the class through a full day at school. She asked each of their teachers to complete a simple monitoring form on class learning and behaviour, and gathered data from the class file on detentions and exclusions. Then she met with their tutor and subject teachers to reflect on the group. The critical issue that came up was a resistance to listening. Anne suspected that something in the group's experience at school might be at the root of their difficulties. If they were not listening, it was not because they were unable to listen.

Anne proposed taking them out of school for a day with their tutor, head of year and their drama and English teachers. In a local community centre, we played out a drama exercise designed to mirror their experience as strangers thrown together in difficult circumstances. Before they started Anne identified various qualities of good teamwork, such as treating each other with respect, backing down from conflict, or sticking up for other people. They threw themselves into role, imagining themselves as survivors of a plane crash in the Brazilian jungle. Afterwards they listened proudly as the two observing teachers described the many moments of teamwork they had witnessed.

In the afternoon Anne invited the students to draw links between the

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For more information on ELLI, the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory described on page 6 and developed by the University of Bristol, go to www.ellionline.co.uk

drama and their experience at school. Could they survive as a team through the next two and a half years? A passionate dialogue opened up about the mutual distrust and suspicion between girls and boys in the group. There was no way to resolve such complex issues on the day, but people expressed relief that they had been voiced. Over the following weeks, their English and drama teachers looked out for opportunities to resume the conversation so that they could remind the group of its desire and capacity to collaborate. By the end of term, students and their teachers agreed that they had moved on significantly. The girls were much more confident and teachers found they had much less difficulty being heard.

There seemed to be two crucial elements that contributed to this result.

- The metaphorical exercise gave the class a safe space to experience themselves as a genuine community of learners, not just a random collection of individuals.

- The presence of their tutor and teachers—observing, feeding back, listening attentively without imposing solutions—demonstrated a deep sense of caring and a willingness to trust that the group could solve its own problems.

Two years later, one of the girls told us what a turning point the day had been for the group:

Everyone sort of got everything off their chest and then people could acknowledge that was how they were feeling, and they could take that on board and try to change themselves. And all of the class actually did do that, which is why things changed. I think people actually listened.

Before, if you were to say something, people would just brush it off and go like, that's nothing, we don't care. But after that day, people actually thought oh no, they really are feeling like this and we need to listen to what they're saying.

Another girl added:

I think the session sort of helped even outside the whole class. It does help you be more confident around other people and not be afraid of saying things to them.

And one of the boys described how he has learned to deal with conflict:

Compromise. You know in life that you aren't gonna get all you want. So if you compromise—a bit of my way, a bit of your way—you might get somewhere.

In our third year the Social Inclusion Faculty decided to adopt this model to engage another 'difficult' class. Anne summarised the key steps for them:

1. Identification: A class in need of help will typically be causing concern across a wide range of subjects, with staff at all levels of experience and skill. They may have suffered a lack of continuity, such as a change in form tutor or frequent supply teachers, or there may be particular tensions around gender, race, bullying, or students with special educational needs.

2. Assessment: This should include a range of data including baseline information on detentions and exclusions; teacher observations and at least one full-day observation by a non-teaching observer; collaborative reflection with all staff working with the group. Key questions to ask are: What does it feel like to work with this class? What do class members appear to be feeling?

3. Intervention: Reflecting on the class experience is a form of intervention as it helps staff explore the group's emotional and social tensions. Before further intervention, staff should:

- agree a metaphor that will allow the class to engage 'at one remove' with the typical group dynamic;
- set aside a day to work collaboratively with the class, using drama or some other experiential approach to explore the metaphor, followed by discussion that enables the group to draw links between the metaphorical experience and their 'real life' at school;
- meet again with the whole class some weeks or months later to discuss progress in the group.

4. Evaluation: Repeat the initial observations and compare results, reflecting on any changes in class learning and behaviour.

LEARNING TO WORK AS A GROUP

Following the work described above, Martin and his deputy Jan Hallett asked us to work with the year 7 tutor team. Their idea was that we should explore ways of helping tutor groups to develop a sense of community, and that this work should start from their earliest days in the school.

At a team meeting in October 2003, Anne suggested that regular opportunities to share stories about their experience as a group would help foster a sense of shared identity and purpose. She proposed using a monthly PSHE lesson to try out a sample lesson plan that she had prepared.

Two members of the group who had worked with us before said they would give it a go, but others expressed

concern about the stories students might share. What if they criticised other teachers? What if they disclosed incidents or issues that teachers could and should not deal with in the group? We backed off, suspecting that we had plunged in too quickly.

Charles Snyman, however, was determined to pursue the idea. He was the English teacher who had joined us for the day's work with a difficult year 9 class. He was also teaching English to his year 7 tutor group, and he knew how much it would help their learning if they could talk openly together. At first he tried to tackle things head on, asking students: 'What would it take for us to have a meaningful discussion?' Frustrated at the lack of richness in their responses, he remembered how Anne had used metaphor and drama to open up discussion in the year 9 class. Over the spring and summer terms, he created a game-based programme called 'Mystery Island: an approach to emotional literacy'.

Charles describes his programme as 'a means to an end, designed to present a number of problem-solving experiences in an active, dynamic and fun way, which will eventually springboard young people to deal with the sort of events and problems that they will encounter in their own lives'. Working in groups of five or six, students imagine themselves on an island with varied habitats and limited resources. Each challenge they face gives rise to conflict between players who have been assigned different roles and interests. This provides a wealth of opportunities to help them reflect on their feelings, explore their differences, and develop their understanding of themselves and others. Group composition is critical to ensure a potent mix of gender, ability, interests and personality. At key moments Charles stops the game, asking students to plot themselves on an 'emotional thermometer'. At the end they use a colour chart to record how engaged they were in the session. This provides instant feedback on students who may need individual attention.

Charles cautions that 'experiential

learning is a powerful methodology but also one of the most difficult to manage'. When the assistant head of year asked him to share his programme with the team, we arranged for him to start by training and team-teaching with two other year 8 tutors. After feedback from them, the whole year team agreed to trial the programme over the summer term. If the evaluation is positive, Mystery Island will become a standard unit for year 8 PSHE.

LEARNING TO LEARN TOGETHER

Charles was convinced that helping his tutor group acknowledge their feelings and negotiate their relationships would not only further their personal and social development but also improve their learning. In our third year at Lister Anne began to develop this idea with subject teachers, using a curriculum-based approach to foster effective learning in class groups.

Again, the work began with an underachieving class in the new year 9. Anne used the same assessment process, this time observing a class that seemed to enjoy being together, yet shut out their teachers with their constant noise-making and unwillingness to listen. This was particularly the case when they were asked to work in groups.

Anne suspected that their difficulty lay not in any particular group history, but in more general anxiety about the challenges of learning in the presence of others. She suggested working directly on the group's skills and motivation for learning and arranged for the class to complete the ELLI (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) questionnaire. This had been developed by the research team at the University of Bristol's Graduate School of Education who were acting as our advisers on the project.

ELLI finds out how learners perceive themselves in relation to seven dimensions of 'learning power':

Changing and learning - having a sense of themselves as being able to become stronger learners

Meaning making - seeing how things fit together

Curiosity - asking questions and delving beneath the surface

Creativity - playing with ideas

Learning relationships - able to work with others as well as on their own

Resilience - giving it a go and sticking at it

Strategic awareness - demonstrating awareness of how they learn best

Their profile revealed that the class had a very positive sense of their capacity to get better at learning. However, there were noticeable weaknesses in other dimensions, particularly their attitudes to learning with and from others.

Christian Hindes, English teacher for the class, worked with Anne to introduce the learning power concepts. They encouraged the students to develop their own images for each dimension and to use them as a framework for reflecting on their own learning.

In the summer term, when SATs were over, Chris and Anne began a planned unit on advertising by getting students to think about different types of group leadership (authoritarian, passive & democratic). The whole unit was structured around work in small groups, with ongoing peer observation and feedback to encourage discussion about the quality of teamwork and its impact on their learning and achievement. In July the class again completed the ELLI. Their new profile showed an increase from 3.8% to 23.8% in the numbers rating themselves highly on the dimension of learning relationships. Such a significant shift in self-concept indicates that many more now recognise the value of working collaboratively. The one dimension that showed a drop against the December

Philosophy has had a tremendous effect in strengthening and deepening the relationship I have with my class. We come together as equals, with the shared understanding that what we say will be listened to and valued.

profile was resilience, which includes the capacity to resist distractions and to 'stick with it' when things feel difficult.

The obvious next step was to begin this work with younger students, so as to help them develop more effective strategies for coping with the challenges of learning together. Since September 2004 Anne has been working with two English teachers (Christian Hindes and Katie Dwight) and two colleagues in Humanities (Sarah Morgan and Fiona McEwan). Each has focused on a target class in year 7 or 8.

Together they have developed an introductory series of seven lessons on the ELLI dimensions of learning power. The aim is that these should serve as a springboard for ongoing reflection and discussion on learning within existing schemes of work. All four teachers are very clear that they need to 'walk the talk', reflecting openly about their own experiences of learning and the range of feelings that learning is bound to provoke. This is only possible in a culture where students and staff alike feel respected and valued, and where mistakes are understood as the gateway to new learning.

STUDENT VOICE

Students' experience of school is also powerfully shaped by what happens beyond the classroom, where the play of events is (and needs to be) less tightly controlled by staff. Creating opportunities for reflective conversation right through the school day enables young people to take increasing responsibility within the wider school community. The challenge, as Martin says, is to ensure that the 'institutional voice meets the student voice'.

At Gallions, our main strategy beyond the classroom was peer mediation. Staff hoped that training older pupils to help resolve playground disputes would encourage other children to 'internalise' the principles of respectful behaviour. We brought in Conflict and Change, a local Newham agency, to provide training. Pam Williamson, learning mentor and staff

lead for the scheme, selected 14 children for the first round of training, which took up three days. They were not all 'model' pupils—some were getting support from Pam on managing their own behaviour—but they had all convinced her of their commitment. Conflict and Change also ran three twilight sessions for all staff to demonstrate how pupil mediators would work.

Things almost fell apart when Pam's car accident took her out of school for weeks just as the mediators were due to begin work. They did manage to do some informal mediation within years 5 and 6, but until Pam returned they had no duty rota and very little recognition from other children or staff. By the end of our project, Pam had established a strong system which involved badges of office, fortnightly team meetings, and an apprenticeship period for new mediators every spring. Yet one experienced mediator told our evaluator that they still felt 'overlooked'. This led to Pam agreeing to a more proactive strategy of facilitating games and friendly play rather than just waiting for disputes to arise.

At Lister, where peer mentoring was already established alongside a student council, we focused on building relationships and smoothing logistics so that students felt better equipped to take up their roles. Jill Geddes now starts every year with a social meeting for new council members, who are elected in pairs from each year forum. She has also worked hard to find quiet spaces where year 10 mentors can meet their year 7 and year 8 clients to hold confidential discussions. I did some work with assistant heads of year, helping them think about the difference between teaching a class and enabling students to facilitate forum meetings.

One of the more innovative approaches to student voice at Lister was the Behaviour Group, which had been working with Naomi Bourne. They had come together in their first year at the school, after a group of students wrote to her and to Martin expressing concern about behaviour. Anne worked with Naomi and the

students involved to make it a more representative group, including pupils not known for their good behaviour. In our third year, Behaviour Group members led discussions with whole tutor groups and with focus groups from across year 10, researching issues such as a rise in internal truancy. They found that many students were feeling uncertain in class, now that GCSE options had reshuffled learning groups in most subjects. We fed that information back to subject teachers, hoping it would encourage them to think about the need for community-building with class groups of every age.

STAFF REFLECTION

Staff also need to feel respected, valued and listened to if they are to work and learn effectively. Talking and thinking together about what is going on can make an enormous difference to people's experience at work. But it can be difficult to carve out time and space for open reflection, and to encourage people to participate without feeling forced into something uncomfortable.

Early in our second year, we made some headway at Lister in thinking about how to do this as a result of running a staff workshop about the emotions of learning. Moved by the stories that emerged, we invited interested colleagues to a series of four sessions over the spring and summer. There was some hefty debate about student attitudes to learning, inconsistent messages from management, and the constraints of the wider system.

Towards the end of the year, the group produced a report, by no means glossing over their more painful discussions, but also offering a number of creative ideas for engaging students more effectively. One of the participants told our evaluator that the group had been a 'personal joy'. Another said she would not have survived her first year at Lister without that opportunity.

The group planned enthusiastically to 'bring a friend' to monthly meetings in the third year. However, with Ofsted suddenly looming, numbers started

to dwindle. Two members introduced the idea to new staff and student teachers in our fourth year, and they are now planning a re-launch for the summer term. The group may struggle to survive, however, unless it can somehow be booked in to the regular meeting cycle. This is a real challenge at secondary level.

There are challenges at primary too, of course. Time is equally limited, support staff may not be paid to stay on for staff meetings, and when they do meet together people may be wary of sharing difficulties if they feel they will be judged. But in a smaller school it is easier for people to get to know one another, providing informal support across the team. An interested outsider like myself can help by taking on a listening role.

At Gallions the precedent was set in the one-to-one interviews that I ran with seven staff for our initial survey. Bernadette asked me to repeat the process in our third year at the school, this time offering space for 'thinking out loud' to anyone interested. Some 15 staff took up the offer, and I brought back a number of shared issues to an all-staff meeting. In another school this role might be filled by a governor or other volunteer with some experience of staff support.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Without the whole-hearted commitment of Bernadette and Martin and their senior colleagues, we would have made little progress on strengthening relationships and encouraging reflection across their schools. As Martin says, 'the role of the leader is to show fallibility and model outwardly reflective learning.' Bernadette also talked from the start about the need to 'take risks' and to 'listen to the children', because they 'know what it is to be a child'. It takes considerable resilience from any leader to withstand the pressure to provide all the answers, to encourage open feedback, to listen deeply and respond honestly. If the senior team can hold that stance, staff in any role are more likely to mirror it in their work with students.

the difference it made

GALLIONS PRIMARY SCHOOL

The most important thing this project did for Gallions was to open up communication across the team. Relationships between staff have become much more open and less hierarchical, and that is gradually seeping down to the children.

Having Antidote in was one of the best things we ever did. We could say things to Harriet that we could never say to someone from the LEA. It's not just that they are in the position of judging schools, it's also that they want to find solutions. Working with Antidote, we were able to find our own solutions. The result is that people are more patient about things happening when they are ready to happen, but they are impatient about making sure they are the right things for this school.

My advice to other headteachers would be to find for themselves the sort of critical friend that we found in Harriet. You will need to spend a lot of time talking to him or her, teasing out what you really want. You will also need to find your own approach, because this is very much about deep personal belief. If a headteacher really wants to shape a more emotionally literate school, it will happen. However, it will take time.

Bernadette Thompson

Everyone involved in the Emotional Literacy Initiative would like to thank the AIM Foundation, Tudor Trust, Bridge House Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and DfES Innovations Unit for funding the work described in this report.

LISTER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

"Teachers have benefited from the work they have done on the importance of healthy and positive relationships between teachers and students if the right conditions are to prevail for learning to take root."

Lister Ofsted report (inspection no. 263389), February 2004

Lister has benefited significantly from its relationship with Antidote over a four-year period.

The institution as a whole has grown in maturity, developing its capacity to reflect on relationships across the school. The Emotional Literacy Audit, and its refinement as SEELS, provided invaluable insight into staff and student feelings, revealing how school structures and practices affect relationships, and why there is a need for warmer and more open communication in all areas of school life.

The partnership with Antidote has also enabled us to focus on the needs of groups of students, helping us to understand the social dynamics that affect learning and to develop strategies that enhance relationships for learning. This work has encouraged teachers to be reflective action researchers, assisted by Antidote colleagues.

A further exciting strand of the work has involved using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) to enable students to reflect on themselves as learners and how they can develop their 'learning power'.

In short, our relationship with Antidote has provided high-quality support and critical friendship. Through this partnership, the school has developed a deeper and richer understanding of learning in community, which includes an appreciation of emotional well-being as a prerequisite to deep and sustained learning.

Martin Buck

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