

1 *Introduction*

In recent decades the experience of students, teachers and leaders in schools has been directly affected by a range of external factors, which have fundamentally changed the character and nature of schooling. This book is premised on the understanding that whilst politicians claim success for education reforms by quoting improvements in numeracy and literacy targets they refuse to acknowledge or engage with the deeper-seated negative effects of relentless change on the psychological health of schools and communities. Neither do they confront the relationship between many of their educational policies and the crisis in confidence felt by leaders, teachers and pupils in many schools.

Many 'failing' schools for example, are trapped in a performance cul-de-sac with few means at their disposal for turning themselves around within the required one year period to prevent school closure (Harris et al., 2006). There has been relatively little consideration or systematic investigation into the emotional distress of pupils, parents and communities as a result of school failure and school closure,¹ but it is reasonable to speculate that in many communities this has contributed to a collective sense of hopelessness with associated feelings of being 'missed', let down and marginalised. It is my contention that the instrumental and accountability driven approach to system-wide reform has created more disturbing and challenging problems for society and schools to grapple with. This is a position finding widespread support in other countries (Elmore, 2003; Williams, 2001).

There is a real crisis in education best exemplified perhaps by the prevalence and seriousness of violence against teachers (NAS/UWT, 2004), by the numbers of teachers that have retired early with stress-related ill-health and the large number of newly qualified teachers that fail to take up appointments in schools or leave the profession within five years of completing their training (Carlyle and Woods, 2002). It is acknowledged that global capitalism, the rise of the technological society,

2 *Supporting the emotional work of school leaders*

the pace of change, the demise of traditional community support systems and the widening gulf between rich and poor have contributed to high levels of psychological damage in society. It is sad and possibly inevitable that the social and emotional effects of these changes are reflected back to us through the attitudes and behaviours of children and young people in our schools.

So, what does this book have to offer teachers and leaders committed to enhancing the educational experience of all members of their school community? In this book I draw on extensive personal and professional experience of working in schools, on empirical evidence and on the literature on teacher effectiveness, human relations, counselling, school improvement and educational leadership to propose a more dynamic, inclusive and relational stance towards school change. Unlike the task and performance models of school improvement that have dominated the educational landscape, the approach presented in this book places people, relationships and learning back in the driving seat of change.

Given this premise, there is no intention or pretence to offer a 'quick fix' to the current set of circumstances or to provide a set of techniques aimed at short term solutions. Instead, I am concerned to engage readers with the deeper personal, social and emotional challenges of change leadership, to highlight the intra-personal, interpersonal and inter-group dynamics that underpin and permeate school life. These dynamics may reflect healing, energising forces for good or the contaminating, emotionally draining forces of criticism, negativity and apathy. These aspects of organisational life are often noticed and felt at an intuitive level. They are less often acknowledged, understood and engaged with in ways that accept and affirm the underlying distress in schools and see it as symptomatic of something bigger which needs respectful, caring and firm attention.

It is my belief that despite working harder and longer hours to support children and to implement change, many teachers are pedalling against a policy current that appears so strong that teaching has become literally heartbreaking and soul destroying work. The research and experience underpinning this book have led me to the view that schools have all the ingredients to create enriching, loving communities of practice yet vital nutrients are not being harnessed to revitalise, enthuse and energise jaded professionals. The unique perspectives, passions and intelligences of young people, parents, teachers and support staff have leadership capabilities which, if honoured, embraced and

nurtured, can lead to active engagement and participation in leadership practices and foster deep, sustainable, relation-rich learning and personal growth.

As a gestalt psychotherapist I bring a certain theoretical lens and set of values to the analysis of data. Three of these are worthy of mention at this point in my deliberations. I aim to provide the reader with some insights into the differently textured threads that are woven into the fabric of this work. Firstly, Kurt Lewin's (1951) 'field theory' is a point of view that I find useful as a way of perceiving events holistically. It is one map of the territory of human experience in relationship, wherever (for example, classrooms, playground, staffroom) and however (for example, pairs, groups, departments) those relationships are constituted. A field theory map of human experience extends the concept of holism, that is, viewing the person as a 'whole' intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual being, to include the person in their environment, culture and community. This 'whole' way of seeing and thinking acknowledges and embraces the intimate inter-connectedness between the individual, the events that shape their lives and the settings in which these events take place.

In field theory the act of knowing is also a relationship between the perceiver and perceived as events are always perceived in relationship. Each individual is therefore an agent in the field as well as a recipient of others' engagements in the field and will construct their version of events in ways that suit how they position themselves and are also positioned within the field. There is, for example, an interactive field between myself the author and you the reader right now. As I sit here I wonder what energies, ideas and feelings you are bringing to my work as you read.

Secondly, this book is underpinned by a belief in the equivalence and equi-potentiality of reason and emotion in helping people to make sense of their lives and of their personal, social and professional identities (Parks, 2000). Schools are powerhouses of emotion as individuals engage with each other, with learning, with their values, and with the everyday pleasures, excitements and joy that occur when relationships and learning combine in creative exploration and discovery. They are also minefields of disappointment, envy, 'fear, anguish, depression, humiliation, grief and guilt', and not just for the teachers involved. In Jeffrey and Woods (1996) study of teacher stress it is clear that children and young people also bear the brunt of teachers' negative emotions in the 'field' that is the classroom.

4 *Supporting the emotional work of school leaders*

Most recently, worrying trends of violence have taken root in some schools as young people reflect back and act out the depersonalisation and rage they experience in their daily lives. Instrumental educational change has created a culture of mistrust, hostility and conflict (Halton, 1995) which studies of teacher emotions have largely avoided exploring in any detail.

Exercise

Which of the aforementioned emotional constructs most closely resemble your own experience of school and are there any that you particularly notice by virtue of their absence?

Finally, this work is premised on a humanistic view of human nature (Goldstein, 1939; Allport, 1955; Maslow, 1970, 1971), namely that the majority of people have an innate natural tendency to engage with their environment in personally and socially constructive ways. In other words, everyone has agency and therefore the potential for different levels and forms of leadership, whether in relation to learning, administration, individual and collective well being or community relations. However, in the course of human development through childhood and into adulthood everyone experiences challenges to their core sense of self, self worth and self efficacy. Indeed it is the formative process of working through such experiences that supports maturation and enhances the capacity for effective relating with others, particularly those in authority. Unfortunately, many young people experience such intense and sustained challenges to and violations of their core sense of self that they are unable to engage with the process of maturation. Their interactions with significant others, usually people in authority, have involved the intentional or unintentional misuse or abuse of personal power.

In this way the political, economic and social conditions in wider society are heartlessly and aggressively acted out in both private and public spaces. Persistent experiences of being undermined, dismissed, shamed or traumatised by rage, for example, have a deleterious effect on the individual's view of themselves and act as inhibitors of personal growth, learning and agency. Furthermore, the earlier such abuse is experienced the sooner a habit of violence and aggression is internalised that is highly resistant to change (Rutter et al., 1998). In other words, being treated as an object, an 'It' rather than as a person, rubs off, especially when the social, political and cultural field reinforces this

view of certain people as objects and when the majority view of 'normality' and 'acceptability' is used to oppress or disenfranchise certain minority groups.

A huge market in self help books perpetuates the myth that socially inflicted psychological wounds can be cured by individual's cognitive understanding and introspection. Deep, sustained healing, however, needs at least one sensitive, responsive and reparative relationship, which is experienced in a safe, consistent and emotionally containing environment. In such conditions the individual's pain and distress is heard, accepted and actively 'met' or responded to by gently challenging the internalised feelings of negative worth and value. Such relationships can be nurtured in school settings to support individuals and groups (Pattison and Harris, 2006; Harris, Vincent et al., 2006; Hudson, 2006). However, the relational stance that is promoted here transcends that of the traditional counsellor, pastoral teacher or leader. Whilst self awareness is accepted as the sine qua non of good citizenship and leadership, awareness and emotional competences are not considered to be sufficient. In fact, the competency model of emotional intelligence advocated by Goleman (1995) and others, may unwittingly collude with and reinforce an 'I-It' approach to relationships, whereby the right skill or phrase can be prized from the emotional toolkit to ensure that individuals collaborate in the implementation of personal rather than social agendas.

More creative relationships are needed, founded on deep inner awareness, knowledge and understanding of self in all constructive and destructive configurations. In this way, the self that engages with pupils, colleagues, parents, governors and the wider educational community is fully present (emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and morally), fully inclusive (in touch with the needs, wishes and preferences of self and simultaneously able to reach out and 'touch' the needs, wishes and preferences of the other) and willing to make a commitment to the co-creation of the field (to the spontaneity and creativity of the moment and the endless possibilities of what unfolds in the contact between both parties). Such relationships acknowledge our vulnerabilities and cultivate and refine our strengths together with the leadership capacity that lies untapped or is expressed through less socially constructive patterns of behaviour. Such relationships treat the other as a cherished 'Thou' rather than an 'It'.

To summarise, I argue that the current social, political and economic climate has depersonalised communities and cut people off from internal

6 *Supporting the emotional work of school leaders*

and external sources of care and support, making them an 'It'. It is the inability of governments to engage teachers' hearts and minds and to involve them as partners in policy making that is one of the key failures of school reforms and one which has had serious consequences for the power dynamics of relationships experienced in classrooms, staffrooms and playgrounds. The current preoccupation with and pressure to achieve targets leads to relationships characterised more by the exercise of power and control than by the co-creation of engaging learning opportunities and environments. The emotional work of leadership therefore involves facilitating and supporting each person's active engagement in meaningful dialogue, deep learning and collaborative agency. The unfolding 'co-created field' of the classroom, school, educational community or wider social environment is more likely to be experienced as a vibrant, life-enhancing space in which people may thrive and develop their own capacity for leadership. To be effective in this work the leader has a duty of care to attend to their emotional needs and recognise how these might otherwise undermine their most concerted efforts to support, care for and mobilise others. Once more I am wondering how you, the reader, are responding to this assertion on my part and how this interacts with your values and experience.

The empirical base

This work has been informed by my participation in a number of research and development projects. The data from these projects informs large sections of this book. My experience as a secondary teacher, curriculum and pastoral leader, community liaison teacher and school counsellor in deprived, yet vibrant inner city communities, has also contributed to my understanding of the emotional work of leadership and has informed my choice of postgraduate studies in human relations, counselling and psychotherapy.

In recent years hundreds of teachers on experiential taught masters programmes in Human Relations, Counselling, Special Needs and Educational Leadership have developed my understanding and afforded me opportunities to visit schools and work with groups of teachers on specific projects. There is a significant body of research evidence for the effectiveness of experiential learning in human relations for teachers' personal and professional lives (for example, Hall et al., 1988; Hall et al., 1996) and also of the transferability of this learning to school life in

Introduction **7**

England and beyond (for example, Harris and Biddulph, 2000; Harris, 2001). This personal and professional knowledge has informed a series of vignettes which frame specific chapters. The characters and schools represented therein reflect composite depictions of real people, places and events and highlight key issues or themes, without purporting to be based on rigorous research.

The primary data source for this book involved a project undertaken with nine schools located in a Midlands Education Action Zone (MEAZ). The MEAZ launched an Emotional Intelligence (EI) programme in February 2001 with the explicit aims of:

- supporting schools to develop an emotional intelligence strategy within their Strategic Plans and thereby create a facilitative climate in schools to develop and nurture the emotional intelligence of children and staff
- enabling children to be more effective learners and grow into more confident adults.

A number of strategies were put in place to facilitate the development of the EI programme, including:

- EI training and coaching for head teachers
- EI training for school staff
- training in relevant teaching and learning strategies and whole school approaches
- focused work with vulnerable children
- individual school projects to prevent exclusions.

A research project was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the emotional intelligence programme. This formative evaluation was therefore supportive of the overall aims of the programme. It was deemed important to model emotionally intelligent research practices and involve a wide range of stakeholders in each school in a sustained, collective and collaborative inquiry. The emphasis was on encouraging the process of debate and questioning in order to reveal levels of consensus, conflict, contradiction and commonality to participants as well as the researcher. It was recognised that debate offers the opportunity for the generation and renewal of shared understandings and may therefore be valuable in fostering the conviction and consensus needed

8 *Supporting the emotional work of school leaders*

to implement new initiatives and enrich practices in each school. With collaboration at the heart of the methodological approach a protocol was developed to establish a base level of cooperation and trust between the researcher and different stakeholders in the school. The research process took place in three phases:

Phase One

Based on an appreciation of each school as a field an attempt was made to understand the culture and climate of each school within its specific context. An initial half-day visit to each school involved the following activities:

- An interview with the head teacher to establish their motivation for and hopes of engagement in the EI programme, their understanding of the school's climate and culture and of any particular factors affecting the school's capacity for success in the emotional domain.
- Interviews with other key staff who were unable to attend a staff meeting after school. These included kitchen staff, parent helpers and teaching assistants.
- A classroom based session with between 10 and 12 pupils to discover their feelings about school and their capacity for emotional expression and understanding. A circle time format was used with younger pupils and a small focus group format with older pupils (year 6 and above). At the end of the session pupils were invited to take photographs over a few days to record any events, places or people that sparked an emotional response in them. Different arrangements were made for looking after the disposable cameras during class time and overnight. The cameras were then forwarded to the researcher for developing.
- A meeting with the whole staff to introduce the purposes of and processes involved in the research. Staff engaged in a school culture exercise (Hargreaves, 1995) in which they reflected on stories of four types of school (hothouse, traditionalist, welfarist, survivalist) and mapped out their perceptions of their own school on a grid. The exercise was undertaken individually, discussed in pairs and then shared in groups. These groups presented areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Staff were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire based loosely on a SWOT analysis in their own time and to hand these into the school office. The SWOTs were then posted to the researcher for analysis.

Phase Two

The researcher returned to each school for a further half day between four and six weeks after the initial visit. This time the activities involved:

- Further interviews with key individuals.
- A classroom based session with pupils in which they presented and talked about their photos. These were then grouped together to represent key issues. In some schools, pupils worked together to create visual representations of their collective emotional experiences in school. In others, individual pupils talked into a cassette recorder identifying their reasons for choosing particular images while the researcher worked with small groups to clarify positive and negative experiences.
- A focus group of staff from all levels of the school. In the infant, junior, primary and special schools all staff were present, apart from the head teacher. At the secondary school the group was comprised of a cross-section of colleagues with academic, pastoral and ancillary roles. Each group was asked the same core set of questions designed to interrogate the findings of the SWOT analysis in more depth. Pupil's photographic work was also incorporated into the discussions.

Phase Three

A third visit to the school involved a presentation of the research findings at a whole school staff meeting. At this meeting particular strengths of the school were highlighted alongside areas for consideration and development. A discussion of the findings gave space for misunderstandings or factual errors to be corrected. A revised report was then forwarded to each school for final comment.

Phase Four

A summary of key findings from schools across the zone and a set of propositions were presented to a panel of experts convened by the staff of the Education Action Zone in June 2003.

Data was collected from three infants, two junior, two primary, one secondary and one special school. In this book, the data will focus primarily on the findings from one school in each category, although all schools will feature at some point as supporting or contrasting data.

A number of other projects are also referred to in the course of this book and therefore a brief summary of each is in order here:

10 Supporting the emotional work of school leaders

- Improving the Quality of Education for All – IQEA (Harris 2004)
- Schools Facing Extremely Challenging Circumstances – OCTET (Harris et al., 2006)
- Promoting Emotional Development – PED (CSHR 2003).

All of these research projects involved an integral focus on the emotional development of teachers. The PED project focussed only on the emotional domain, whereas the OCTET project involved a consistent emotional strand to teacher and school development alongside other ‘third wave’ school improvement approaches (Harris and Crispeels, 2006). IQEA involved a limited focus on emotional development. In addition, some data will be taken from the Coalfields Alternatives to Exclusion (CATE) project (Harris et al. 2006), an evaluation of a Local Authorities strategy to eliminate exclusion. Whereas the research method and findings of three of these projects (IQEA, OCTET, CATE) are in the public domain, the evaluation of the PED project is still awaiting publication.

All data is presented in a format which identifies the type of school, the role identity of the respondent and the source of the data. These are presented as follows:

<i>Type of school</i>	<i>Role identity</i>	<i>Data source</i>
I = Infants	H = Head Teacher	SWOT = Paper-based
J = Junior	D = Deputy Head	SWOT analysis
P = Primary	Teacher	I = Individual
M = Middle	S = Member of Senior	Interview
S = Secondary	Management	FG = Focus Group
SS = Special School	Team	
PRU = Pupil Referral Unit	TL = Teacher Leader	
	J = Newly or recently qualified teacher	
	CA = Classroom Assistant	
	P = Pupils	

Therefore *P-H-I* represents an individual interview with the head teacher of a primary school.*

Not surprisingly, all of the MEAZ schools had experienced difficulties and challenges in previous years. However, it is important to note

that all nine schools had achieved higher than the median of their benchmark group in at least one subject, with primary schools showing a substantial improvement of 6.6% in 2001 (as against 1.2% nationally) in Key Stage One results and 5% (compared with 0.3% nationally) at Key Stage Two. Most schools had moved beyond reactive fire-fighting towards more proactive management approaches and several schools' School Improvement Projects had been singled out for praise by Ofsted and HMI. Whilst the MEAZ schools may not be a representative sample in terms of their location or catchment group, the sample is sufficiently large to draw inferences about the emotional work of leaders.

All interviews were recorded on tape and professionally transcribed and the analytical reports presented to each school were modified in the light of additional comment and information. The first level analysis was through comparative analysis of different narratives within the school context to develop a rich, thick description of emotional experiencing. The second level of analysis across the Zone schools, extended the comparative analysis to identify major themes and categories, and used grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Overview of the chapters

The first two chapters in this book map the field conditions affecting the emotional life and experience of communities, schools and individuals and offer an overview of what is meant by the emotional work of leaders in this context. Chapter Two considers the impact of globalisation on the nature of schooling. As previously argued this context has had a negative impact on people's sense of their own efficacy, worth and well being. The phrase 'repetitive change injury' is intended to highlight the prevalence of traumatic stress in schools as evidenced by teacher and leader stress and the disturbing rise in mental health problems in young people. Schools cannot afford to ignore this phenomenon if they are to develop professional communities of practice in which leadership, learning and well being occupy peoples' energies and underpin their relationships. Chapter Three builds on the theme of relationships to explore the emotional conditions that support the development of inclusive learning communities. Developing emotional fitness, literacy, maintenance and depth is understood to contribute to sustainable personal and professional growth and school change.

Chapters Four to Nine draw on the empirical data to identify key

12 *Supporting the emotional work of school leaders*

factors that support the emotional work of school leaders and offer ways of nurturing these in self and others. Chapter Four focuses specifically on enhancing emotional awareness to help leaders remain in touch with their inner experience and to respond appropriately and authentically to the daily opportunities and challenges of leadership. Chapter Five identifies ways in which life experience can inhibit the capacity for emotional experiencing and relating to others. Developing awareness of these personal processes alerts the leader to the creative adjustments they made to the field conditions of their original family and community and enables them to be more accepting and empathic towards themselves. Such self-acceptance also embraces the less palatable, or shadow aspects of self. If kept out of awareness and unchecked these are likely to leak out and contaminate relationships with others, undermine trust and damage school climate. Equally, leaders are vulnerable to the effects of others' shadows and may need to protect themselves. Navigating a path through such two way wounding is the subject of Chapter Six. This is followed by an exploration of the role of values in creating and sustaining inclusive schools. It is argued that stakeholders must be actively engaged in meaningful dialogue and supported to reach informed decisions based on common ground expectations. This requires rigorous attention to interpersonal and inter-group processes as schools seek to respond constructively to daily changes in the field conditions without alienating or disenfranchising those they serve.

If leaders are to create vibrant communities of practice in their schools and classrooms they must acknowledge that this is emotionally draining work. Chapter Eight therefore is concerned with developing cultures of care in which the leader's own needs and the needs of their colleagues and pupils are respected and attended to. This is not just a matter of work-life balance but of ensuring that time spent in school has enough joy, stimulation and opportunities for meaningful engagement in learning that community members feel energised and enthused by events and committed to each other's humanity and well being. Whilst evidence is offered to support this, it is recognised that this is an ideal scenario for many schools which find their efforts dismissed or sabotaged by a critical mass of young people and/or their families. It is easy for such schools to fall into despondency and develop a collective sense of hopelessness. An understanding of post-traumatic stress in young people and the repetitive change injury suffered by teachers and schools is offered in Chapter Nine. It is argued that new kinds of com-

mitments and relationships are needed to create enough safety, trust and persistence for collaborative, cooperative, mutually rewarding and growthful learning.

Endnote

All data has been anonymised therefore the names of individual and schools are fictitious.

¹ Hargreaves (2004) article on 'disgust' is a notable exception.