



# Systemic Learning Tools

Bringing human systems to life...  
touching, seeing, feeling, exploring, learning, changing



Chapmanslade Church of England Primary School using the **Feelings Thermometer**



The **Group Mobile** in use at Ralph Allen Secondary School, Bath, UK

## Seeing ourselves in new ways

Human systems – families, school classes, social groups – are complex, with many parts and influences often hidden, such as relationships of belonging and exchange, closeness and distance, hierarchy and status, attention and focus, time and place. Children, like all of us, are subject to the unseen but powerful forces operating in the systems they are a part of. Consequently they may feel certain responses and emotions intensely and bodily. These cannot always be easily expressed. Physical objects, sensitively selected, designed and created can provide ways of exploring these emotions and hidden relational dynamics.

This allows human systems to be brought to life, encouraging the sharing of moods and feelings that leads to greater understanding and learning.



## Case Study

These are excerpts taken from **Enhancing Children's Learning**: a research report on the application of systemic approaches in primary schools.

When working systemically, how the elements of a system are configured in space matters a great deal. The research featured a number of teachers exploring the benefits of working as a creative learning circle developing thoughts and ideas based on systems mapping. Back in the classroom children were able to make maps of their own family or friendship systems using post-it notes on paper, or by making mobiles, or by forming mini-constellations. The children engaged with these processes easily and were able to draw a good deal of information from them. The exercises encouraged children not to see a simple linear causality but to see patterns, themes, inter-relationships and consequence.

[A teacher] referred to the use: "...of the mobile as a metaphor for classroom balance – it enables pupils to take responsibility for behaviour and the 'mechanics' of the classroom." It became a vehicle for the class group to explore the consequence of behaviours on their system almost as they were happening and collectively evaluate at the end of their day. This approach seems to open up the receptivity of the children to the topic and allow a high level of engagement and learning.

Another said of the **Feelings Thermometer**, they had developed "I asked the children to close their eyes and think for a moment about recent feelings – they readily generated vocabulary and the class listened to happy and unhappy scenarios then confidently clipped their pegs onto the class thermometer to describe visually how they felt. I was surprised that not one child was nervous or reluctant to do this. As expected some pegs were placed in predictable places; but some were put in what some children thought to be surprising places. The discussion that followed was incredibly valuable..."

It became clear that by accessing the **Feelings Thermometer** in the safe set-up of the circle, a natural open-mindedness and tolerance was being nurtured in each individual as each response was handled honestly and accepted as normal.

## Learning tools for children – and the adults who guide them

A number of innovative and versatile learning tools have emerged from these teachers working together. The classroom tools and the activities associated with them enable teachers and support staff to help children and young people see and explore their wholeness and inter-connectedness.

### How are we feeling?

The **Feelings Thermometer** helps students identify and understand the range of their emotions while developing a collective sensitivity to their own and each other's moods and feelings.

### How can we restore our balance?

The **Group Mobile** invites teachers and students to explore their inter-connectedness, and their sense of belonging to the class group. The Mobile is used to create and maintain balance and harmony within a classroom.

### Where is our right place?

**Place People** enable children, parents and teachers to develop a sense of their 'right place' in groups and communities, as well as to gain insight into where they can respond more creatively to life together.

### How are we as group?

**Ubuntu** jigsaw pieces enable pupils, teachers and learning support assistants to take a deeper creative look at, and strengthen the patterns of relationships that exist within the classroom.

To learn more about any of our **Systemic Learning Tools**  
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