

Teaching with NLP



Karen Shaw

karen@inspiredcoaches.co.uk
www.inspiredcoaches.co.uk

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Education - Teaching with NLP
by Karen Shaw

I recently entered education to experience working in a community-centred organisation with a high social impact. Whilst training to be a business coach, I wanted to experience the challenge of teaching children in a greatly disadvantaged catchment and see if my professional development skills would be of value in this context. Like many new teachers, some of my first few lessons were akin to a battleground. I took the 'knocks and bruises' with good humour.

NLP has taught me that the only thing you can change is yourself! Which means the only thing a teacher can change in the classroom is themselves. Everything that happens in the classroom is a function of that teacher's projection and communication. This is empowering and challenging. The empowering part is that owning your own projection allows you to discover what within yourself is reflected so you can change future projections to make them more desirable. Put simply, change yourself and you change that classroom. The challenge is that it also means a teacher must take full responsibility for everything that happens in that classroom.

With this mindset, I set out as an NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) to be critically minded, highly reflective and self-evaluating. What follows are some of the positive learnings I have gained from this process, under two headings: engagement and relationship.

Engagement

I believe teaching isn't just about the delivery of knowledge and skills. It's about building confidence and self-esteem and inspiring young generations. Yet one of the biggest challenges I find in the classroom is getting students inspired, motivated or, more specifically, taking responsibility for their own learning.

Challenging my own projection on this, I now 'see' and 'assume' students as motivated in class and if they are not, I know I haven't made the lesson accessible. Accessibility is a challenge in classes where there is a wide range of abilities and I have tried techniques to support students 'buying in' to learning in different ways. I have learnt that some students want meaning, some abstract information, some application, and others evaluation.

I have therefore tried to be flexible in lesson delivery, using a wide range of sensory language, metaphors and similes and embracing Bernice McCarthy's 4 MAT system:

- Why are we exploring this topic? (35% of students)
- What additional information do we need? (22% of students)
- How is this learning useful? (18% of students)
- What if there are errors/unseen possibilities/new scenarios? (25% of students)

This means my lessons follow a typical structure: a question, a discussion about the 'why' and a sharing of views, followed



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by a level of academic abstract information, which is then tested through a level of application and a 'what if' evaluation as a conclusion.

Taking full responsibility for student motivation, however, hasn't felt entirely appropriate. So, I've challenged myself to push the responsibility for learning back onto students also. A seasoned teacher told me to build autonomy, choice and self-gratification. So, I have started to embed some coaching techniques and to see each lesson as a journey from A to B, with A being where students are now in their understanding and B the lesson outcome. How students move from A to B with the resources I supply is up to them.

I give as much choice and autonomy in their learning as possible. I have steered away from judging responses or giving answers (unless modelling) and use more reflective questioning. I show appreciation for student opinion and collaboration and at the end of the lesson I asked students what learning has occurred, in their view (not mine). Whilst this doesn't mean I have fully motivated students in my classes, I do believe these techniques have helped me to reduce distraction and improve engagement – and if I forget to use them, I notice the difference.

Building relationships

NLP has also helped me build relationships in the classroom, which is also called rapport. Rapport is the relationship that students have with their teacher and vice versa. In a classroom, a high level of rapport builds an atmosphere of safety, security, care and receptiveness to whatever is being taught. It is fundamentally about a level of professional care. It supports Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where students need to feel all the above before they reach the self-actualisation zone.

To communicate this rapport, I show students I care; I try and 'bring inside' the students that are unsettled; I 'embrace the class' and ensure all students feel included by using truisms, universal questions and handouts; I use the register to do a visual acuity check on student wellbeing; I discuss with students their aspirations, hobbies and interests whenever time allows; and I

support them with 1:1 feedback.

I believe a key part of the teacher-student relationship is keeping calm, neutral and unreactive in my own emotional state. NLP has taught me that communication is 55% physiology, 38% tonality and 7% words. To keep my physiology correct I consciously relax at the start of the class and to stay neutral I am mindful that I do not want to criticise or put negativity into the classroom. I express my needs from students in the context of high expectations, informing students when I want more in terms of behaviour or performance and why. I will try and do this through praise.

Modifying behaviour through praise (rather than criticism) keeps positivity in the class and protects rapport. I know I can praise a student for something small before asking for modified behaviour and praising again after it's happened, and that student will feel good. I can give easy questions to off-task students and praise until their self-esteem and confidence changes in front of me. I also sometimes ignore students who forget to show desired behaviour and immediately praise them when they are back on task. I know every little praise helps, every little feedback helps and every way of showing appreciation and enjoyment for pupil contribution raises the level of rapport and positivity in the room.

Having put all this together, I have realised my style of teaching has become more enquiry and coaching based; I use collaboration, reflection and autonomy whenever possible. I also use rapport, praise and high levels of positivity. I'm acutely aware I am still learning. When I evaluate a lesson after I have performed it in my mental head, there is always room for improvement and there are always things I didn't do.

I observe seasoned teachers with huge respect; they have many techniques of their own to share and have acquired these through years of experience. However, during my short time in teaching, has professional development helped me? Absolutely! I believe having a reflective, self-critical and self-evaluative mindset has made me a far more empathetic, respectful, reflective and conscious teacher. ■