

# Building Resilience Beyond the Classroom



Iain Adenis

[iain@nextstepsnlp.com](mailto:iain@nextstepsnlp.com)  
[www.nextstepsnlp.com](http://www.nextstepsnlp.com)



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range of educational pathways and the development of social activities, but if we miss the step of ensuring psychological safety, we could be missing a crucial piece of the jigsaw.

Increasingly, students with additional support needs are quite rightly accessing mainstream college provision. We are experiencing a growing level of emotional and behavioural needs. We are seeing an increase in complex diagnoses and have insufficient training in this. This brings with it a broad set of issues. We are not yet geared up adequately for these needs, and use standardised protocols and approaches to enable support, which can often fall short of meeting students' needs.

## Where are we now?

Services, by nature, are reactive. We wait for the problem to appear, we wait for it to be sufficiently difficult that we must deal with it, and we then manage what is in front of us. We wait for the problem to die down into something that is less problematic, and then carry on until the problem recurs. This is symptom management. We become quite expert in dealing with this. We become expert in symptom management.

But is this useful? Well, you can't throw the baby out with the bathwater, and there are times where this is hugely important. However, in adopting a

It would be easy to bracket the use of NLP in education purely around academic learning. Indeed, much has been written in this area. However, there are wider applications with a broader contribution.

Having worked in education for over 13 years, and used many psychological models, I can say with confidence that NLP offers us a range of invaluable tools that will enhance the welfare of the students we support. This article focuses on the ever increasing need for emotional support for students, and how we can rise to the challenges.

## Mapping it out

When students transition from school to college, it is meant to be an exciting time where the abundance of opportunity is at the students' fingertips, and choices are made that might affect their careers and relationships for the rest of their

lives. New social connections evolve, accompanied by growth in identity, beliefs and values. An evolution from a pedagogical to an andragogical way of learning is also introduced. In other words, students stop being told what to write or understand, and are encouraged to engage in free, lateral thinking. Experimentation in all areas is an expectation! And, just to top it off, the brain is undergoing a complete rewire, leading to a rejection of many beliefs and ideas, the questioning of role and identity, and physical exhaustion. This is no mean feat.

College life is peppered with anxiety and stress. Students often see the college as a safe place where they can grow and develop with impunity and start to think about taking their first steps towards independence. We can spend as much time as we like on adapting teaching and learning styles, creating a

broader, contextualised NLP approach, we can support students more resourcefully and effectively

It is not difficult to consider other ways of supporting students in a preventative, pre-emptive and systemic manner. In the NLP world, this is not rocket science. Getting the bigger picture often leads to a more resourceful outcome. The simple act of calibration can give us a sense of what's changing during the learner journey. The present state/desired state process that we are so familiar with gives us a useful framework to achieve this. Working with the more subtle approaches of sensory acuity can give strong indications about whether a student is coping with significant changes. I won't bore you with the list of useful techniques that can be applied meaningfully and easily, but the list is endless!

When a distressed student approaches staff, their story may be highly emotional and descriptive. By the time they meet with me, it has become a complex narrative. Traditional approaches might trigger safeguarding protocols, risk assessments, and potential emergency interventions. However, using NLP-based questions like "What specifically happened?" or "What precisely do you mean?" can uncover a clearer picture. Applying the NLP meta model helps us gain a detailed understanding of the situation. While this approach might seem idealistic, I have used it many times to uncover a clearer understanding of their internal representation.

### "That's not my job"

So, where do we draw the line? When do we recognise that we need to take further action? This is the powerful pinch point. Many people don't know where this boundary lies and therefore jump to reactive measures before this is necessary. From a position of 'not knowing', it's easy to say: "That's not my job." Having a useful set of tools to guide people through these principles could be a key element in making sure students get the support they need.

I've undertaken many training sessions with staff. They have talked to me openly and honestly about their difficulties in knowing how to support students. They often confess to feeling overwhelmed when students want to talk about some of the challenges they're experiencing. These issues can sound terrifying and solely manageable within the boundaries of further professional input. But do

we need to do this every time? Can we manage many of these situations easily and effortlessly?

How much do you need to know?

Remember that we're working with people who are scared and unsure. They may have plucked up the courage to come and talk to you because they believe you have the answers, or at least some of the answers. They probably sought you out from a position of trust. It's often an incredibly brave move. How would it be for you if you were able to provide reasonable levels of support rather than 'signposting' them off to yet another person? Self-awareness is the key. It is about knowing enough to know that you don't know enough. And it's useful to be armed with a set of linguistic, conversational and observational tools that can add some clarity to what's really going on. NLP gives us those tools.

A recent government documentation, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Implementation Programme* (May 2024) outlines progress in expanding mental health support teams (MHSTs) across schools and colleges in England. It highlights key areas such as increasing collaboration between educational settings and the NHS, early intervention strategies, and improved mental health training for staff. Within this there are some incredibly useful recommendations such as expanding mental health support teams, strengthening collaboration with the NHS, and enhancing mental health leads. Most importantly, it focuses on early intervention.

These recommendations are highly relevant and could elicit some useful

outcomes. In my experience, a huge area we have missed is in the competence, capability and confidence of the culture itself. Is external intervention always necessary to address challenges? Must we rely on others to identify and resolve issues, or should we develop greater confidence in our own abilities to respond in a compassionate and supportive way? How do we build a truly supportive culture, and promote the 'whole school' approach?

### Conclusion

The future for NLP in education is bright. We are constantly looking for creative ways to support students in meaningful ways. In remembering the presupposition 'the law of requisite variety', we need to develop imaginative ways of giving support to people at this crucial juncture in their lives. By introducing some of the principles of NLP through CPD and other training, the culture itself can be better prepared to support and nurture students on this tricky path. I'm not suggesting we all become Master Practitioners, but a good grounding in the principles, strategies and magic NLP offers would be a useful start. ■

**How would it be for you if you were able to provide reasonable levels of support rather than 'signposting' students off to yet another person?**

