

Behavioural Management with NLP



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By working your neurology into a healthy COACH state of being, lessons and learners will become easier to manage – and your neurology will thank you, too.

Bees dance, dolphins sing, and humans speak; put it all together and what have you got? Articulate mammals using sophisticated communication systems! And how well do we humans use communication? Hitler was a genius at creating disquiet sufficient to instigate two world wars. Martin Luther King was a genius at creating and articulating a 'dream', a message of love and kindness, to which we still aspire today. And the Monty Python team were geniuses at creating some of the best comedy script writing of their time; their *Flying Circus* is considered an evolutionary moment in TV comedy, with which I would agree, and it still makes me laugh to this day.

As teachers, we have the opportunity to communicate with our future generations every day. According to Ofsted, behaviour in classrooms since the pandemic is the worst ever seen. Can we use this as an opportunity to demonstrate the power our language can have over behaviour?

My teaching career began in prison education, working with some very challenging behaviours amongst men. It soon became apparent to me that until the men were mentally present, they were less able to conform and learn. Therefore, I learnt NLP and took it into the classroom. I was the talk of the prison for the good behaviour, focus, learning and achievements made in my classroom as a result.

Since leaving the prison education service, I have continued working with these skills and techniques in one-to-one and group sessions with school students, building GCSE learners' confidence, self-belief, attitude to learning and, ultimately, success. Furthermore, I have worked with mainstream educators to support them through the challenges present in today's classrooms, with successful outcomes.

There are a great many tools I use on a daily basis. In this article, I share with you a few of the easiest to embed into daily routine and language, as a sample of what

can be used to aid behaviour management and learner achievement.

Self first – COACH state teaching

We have all experienced those lessons where 'that child' is present: 'that child' that can create an emotional response in us whilst not even in the room! We see their name on the register and our stomach and heart sink as we think: "What will they be like today? ... How can I best help them achieve? ... How long will they remain in the room? ... Will they allow me to teach?" and many more questions doubting the success of the upcoming session.

A class of multiple learners and ONE learner – that child – is dominating your teaching state. You are in CRASH state: **C**ontracted, **R**eactive, **A**nalysis paralysis (no solutions), **S**eparate and disassociated, **H**ostile. This is, of course, a highly passive state (which is a whole subject on its own, to be addressed outside of this article).

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The opposite of being passive is being active, and we will look at how to create an active state through what Dilts refers to as COACH: **C**entred, **O**pen, **A**ware attentive and alert, **C**onected, **H**ospitable.

Clearly, we know the latter would be the most appropriate teaching/training state, though 'that child' has triggered the former. How can we control our states?

I use the Calm Model, which goes by many other names, and I have added my own take to that which has been altered by many. Once comfortable with the process, it takes just a few moments to do and will transform your attitude and way of being. Use this whenever you need it: at the beginning of the day, during the lesson, last thing at night. By working your neurology into a healthy COACH state of being, lessons and learners will become easier to manage – and your neurology will thank you, too.

Furthermore, you can teach this to your learners. They love learning how to have the power of control over their own emotive states and, in my experience, are grateful for the knowledge.

The Calm Model

Think of something you are good at and enjoy.

Close your eyes and go back to a time that you did this. Build your emotional score up to 8+ with sight/sound/feel/taste etc.

Place both feet firmly on the ground.

Regulate your breathing to an even in and out, down into your belly.

Breathe in the first colour that comes to mind; this is the colour of 'calm'.

Breathe out the old and not so useful.

Gradually work this colour all around your body and down to your feet.

Push the colour down into the ground, deep and wide, to fully connect and be part of this world in a calm and connected manner.

Come back to the room and enjoy the calm.

Classroom positioning

When I learnt the significance of repetition and consistency of positioning in the classroom, this was a game changer for me. It can be considered a form of anchoring, as you are using your physical position in the classroom to anchor desired outcomes.

As an English language teacher, I would use this to teach the tenses: far left of the class for the past; far right for the future; middle for present. When a learner used the past tense instead of the future tense, for example, I would scuttle off to the far right of the room, and they very quickly learnt to self-correct their grammar; no verbal correction from me, just the physical movement.

Once this was mastered, I played around with behaviour management and positioning. When a learner was potentially going to unsettle the class or lose focus, I would move closer to them. Their reward for staying in the learning state was for me to move away. Again, it was a purely physical, non-verbal cue. Sometimes they needed to see a reassuring facial expression or hear a quiet word or two, like "How well are you doing?" or "Your work looks good, keep going," "Your attention is great, just a few more minutes," or "You can do that, yes?"

Let's be honest, no one wants a teacher breathing down their neck, do they? When I pre-empt a learner's state change, they can hold the focus for longer and present better outcomes. Even if they are tipping over and becoming tricky, this works well.

When we call to them across the class they become the focus of attention, so you are on the back foot. They now hold the room and have a lot of ego to maintain, so they will act out. Remove this opportunity and hold the class yourself: move close, talk quietly and reassuringly, and give the learner the time and space they need to achieve their best learning state. Notice how many times you can hold control of the class by making this small change to your classroom positioning.

Get the 'buts' out

The use of negatives in NLP is less than useful – but how many times in a day do you say "I know you want to do that, *but* you need to do this," "You are doing this, *but* I asked you to try to do that," "You can

go outside, *but* you need to finish this first," or "You have done that, *but* if you do this it will be better."

The word 'but' creates a negative statement and therefore the positive communication is less heard and focused on than that of the desired outcome. This is an easy one to achieve – simply change 'but' for 'and' and see the difference it makes.

Read those sentences back to yourself and see how much better they sound in your head with an 'and': "You have done that, *and* if you do this it will be better." Get the idea?

'Try' has a similar effect. When we 'try' to do things, it implies a possibility of failure.

Stop 'trying', start 'doing' and get the 'buts' out – bring in the 'and', and add all that to what you want to achieve for you and your learners in each session. It really makes a difference.

Focus on the 'cans'

We all know about the 'can do' attitude to life. What about the 'can do' attitude in the classroom? How many times in a day do we teachers say "You can't do that now," "You can't use those materials for this," "Can't you listen/sit still for five minutes?" or some such equivalent?

Neurologically, 'can't' is a very harmful word, a bit like 'but'. It takes away anything good or positive we have achieved or want to achieve. Flip these phrases into 'can' and see what you get: "Right now we are doing this, and you can do that later," "Those materials can be used for that; what can you use for this?" and "You can listen for just five minutes and then we can do that."

Think of some of your own commonly used phrases. Move them into 'can' and notice how you 'can' transform the learning environment in your classroom.

Conclusion

In summary, approach the day and each lesson in COACH state; use classroom positioning for teaching and behavioural management; use 'and' instead of 'but'; and focus on what 'can' be done or achieved as a positive outcome. Four little tips to aid with teaching, learning and behavioural management in your classroom. How well will you achieve in class this week? ■