

NLP for Learning: Stories and Tips to Support Children Who Learn Differently



By Lucy Heary

***"Now I know my NLP,
next time won't you sing with me?"***

I imagine if all children could learn NLP just like ABC and 123! What would it be like if children learned, from a very young age, about the connections between their brain, body and feelings? Whether I'm working in a classroom or in a private one-to-one setting, NLP magically slips into my language and methodology. It's wonderful for the children I teach, and for keeping this grown-up in a mindful, grounded, desired-outcome-focused state!

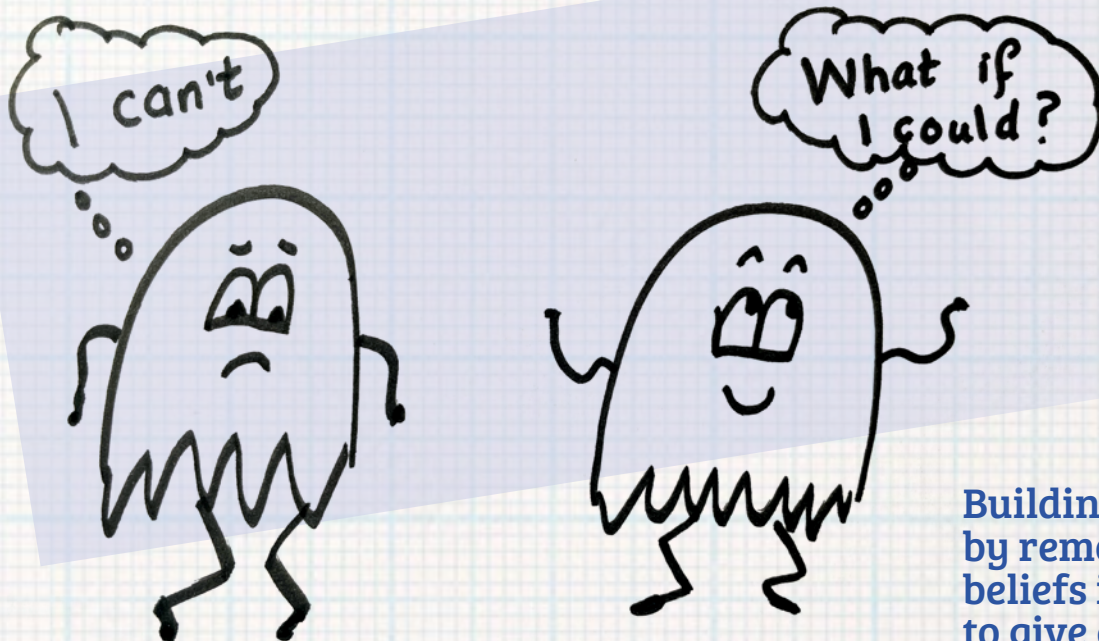
I love to practically support children who struggle academically or emotionally in the conventional classroom. Students who believe they are failing experience overwhelm. They sense the subtle criticism of their words and actions, knowing they are not learning like their classmates. For children who learn differently, other strategies are needed to help them recognise the strengths

of their neurodiversity and to let go of anxiety. Building emotional resilience is key to their ability to learn better.

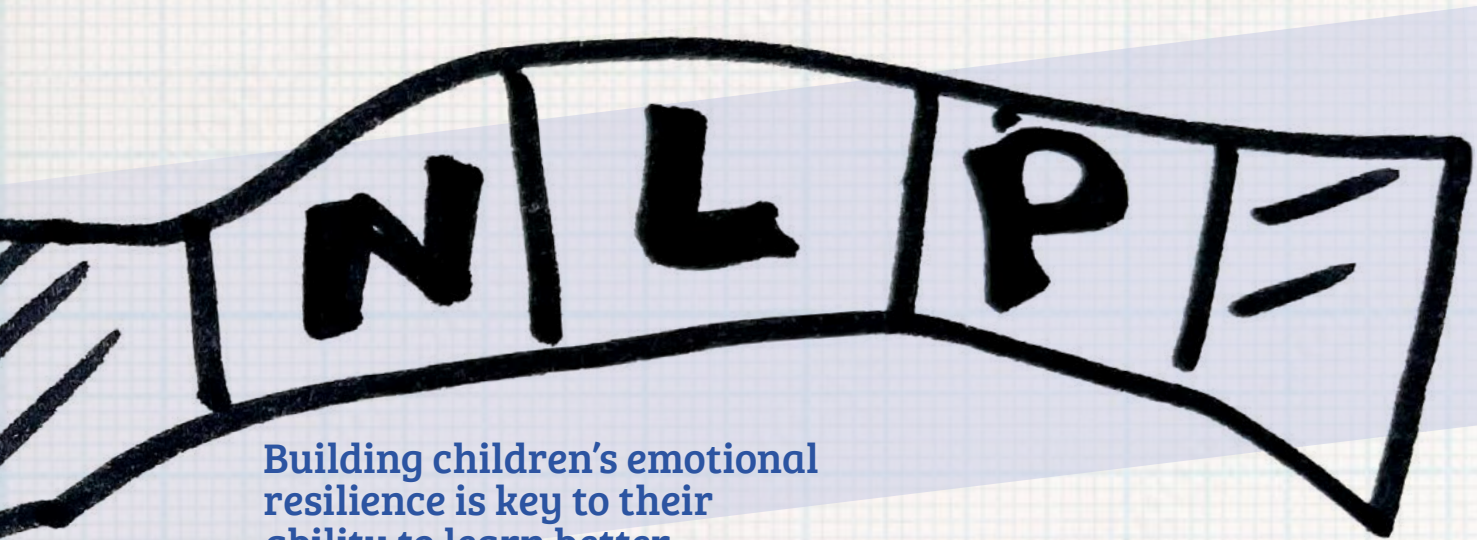
A classroom culture of NLP benefits all children who are emerging from the restrictions of the Covid pandemic. Anxiety is so prevalent right now. NLP tools and techniques develop empowering choices, possibilities for positive change and uplifting language (for child and teacher!). It may be challenging to find the time and space in a busy school for one-to-one coaching; however, it's worthwhile nurturing an NLP approach and cultivating a range of learning strategies in your classroom.

NLP model of communication

Understanding the NLP model of communication changed my awareness of how and why we think, feel and behave the way we



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do. My personal awareness expanded hugely the first time my NLP trainer, Sara Haboubi, explained how we each create our own model of the world. Imagine if children developed this awareness from an early age? How empowering would it be to know your reaction is your choice!

It is thrilling to simply demonstrate to children how their sensory information is processed and how thoughts and behaviours can stem from emotions. Explain to children how their brain works. Start with bringing their awareness to what they already know. Step outside the limits of the classroom curriculum and ask about their hobbies, pets, unusual facts etc. Be curious. Children who struggle academically often believe they know nothing and that they are stupid. But they do know stuff! Help them realise that 'knowing' is a form of remembering. Praise them. Ask them how they are remembering that – all those 'bits' of information. "Really?" said a nine-year-old boy. "I have 100 billion BPS in my brain!" Cool!

I explain, with props, how all information, VAKOG, must pass through a type of sieve in the mind. Using age-appropriate language (no need to mention 'subconscious' to a five-year-old!), I tell children how the brain filters information based on individual experiences and memories. Everyone is different. And that's okay.

Building on self-esteem by removing limiting beliefs is a lifelong gift to give every child. Motivation can change by mapping across from the things they love doing to the work that is challenging. Small changes can make a big difference. Teach children that how their brain works is connected to what they feel in their body. The anchor technique is brilliant for this. I ask children if any of them had a teddy or security blanket when they were small. "Would you bring it into school now?" I ask, to cries of "No way!" So, I explain that having an anchor is like having an invisible teddy or blanket that can comfort you or make you feel happy whenever you want.

Language patterns

What children hear from others and what they tell themselves creates their self-perception and their model of the world. Bringing awareness to this at an early age is vital. We humans are wired to dwell on the negative and this comes through our everyday language: "I hope it doesn't rain," ("I hope it stays dry.") Flip it! I get children to physically do this with their hands when we need to change an 'away from' statement to a 'towards' one instead. "I bet I won't be able to do it" becomes "I know I can do my best."

'Where your thoughts go, the energy flows.'
'Think it the way you want it.'

Sprinkle little phrases like this into your everyday teaching. My family catches me out if I revert to a negative comment. "Ah, Mam, say it the way you want it!" Reframing, changing language patterns and being conscious of our own automatic verbal responses can make a big difference. Throw out those MONs (Model Operators of Necessity) and stock up on MOPs (Possibilities) instead!

NLP has totally enhanced my awareness of the language we use in the classroom, both formally and incidentally. "You have to learn it," "You should know it by now," "You need to do better," ... all MONs. This creates pressure and a feeling that learning is stressful. One time I was coaching some final year students, both aged 17, and I got them to observe the other's physiology when using these heavy words: must, should, need to, have to. We then substituted MOPs such as I can, I choose to, I want to (whether they really felt that way or not about their final school exams!). These two students became wonderfully aware of their internal dialogue and how it could change their perception of the task at hand. Their physiology changed as did their tone of voice when they swapped MONs for MOPs!



► Literacy and numeracy

The biggest impact on my teaching has been Robert Dilts' spelling strategy and the expansion of this by the ever-curious Olive Hickmott. Mental imagery skills are critical for literacy and numeracy. Children love finding out about their eye-accessing cues and how simply moving their eyes up can help them learn and recall much better than before. Have fun in pairs or groups with some prepared sensory questions and watch those eyes start to move!

For example:

Visual Remembered (VR)

- Describe your favourite Marvel character.
- What colours are in the LIDL logo?
- Are the letters upper-case or lower-case?
- What's on your bedroom wall?
- What is your easiest times table?

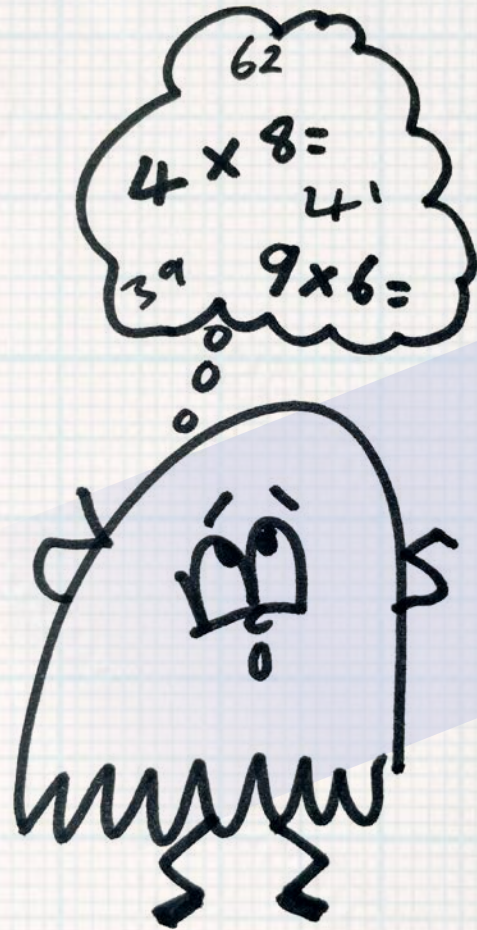
Visual Construct (VC)

- Imagine a big grey elephant driving a red car with yellow wheels.
- Think of your teacher with green hair and huge feet!

*'Look up, look up, raise your eyes.
That's the way to visualise.'*

It is so empowering for children to become aware of their visual learning skills and how they can adopt new strategies to help them spell and read better. In my experience there is an over-reliance on phonics, and children believe this is the only way to remember words.

One little girl could not spell her surname because it had eight letters. "That's too hard for me," she said. She was ten years old,



and this was her limiting belief. Yet she had wonderful personal strengths, and was highly imaginative, very creative, and charmingly giddy! Two key changes for her made a big difference. I taught her how to become calm and grounded within seconds, by only breathing through her nose, and visualising the soles of her feet growing tree-roots. Her physical state changed, making her feel more peaceful (Optimal Learning State) and in turn, she was able to control her thoughts (IR). Instead of trying to sound out each letter, which had been her previous strategy, I helped her visualise the components of her surname. Engaging her body, we added movements, and a funny tone of voice for the repeated letter.

Before starting, we had changed her limiting belief of "I'm stupid!" and then reframed to what she had never been able to do in the past: "I can't spell long words," (away from) to "What if you could?" (towards). In only twenty fun-filled minutes, this ten-year-old could spell her surname and had been NLPed! She was ready to learn better with more self-belief, more motivation, and with more effective personal learning strategies.

Another child could easily spell and read at a standard way above her age, yet she could not remember her times tables. She was so excited when she realised her spelling strategy could successfully be applied to maths! There are so many prevalent negative beliefs around maths that NLP can help to unravel. (I am proof of that!)

So, as the saying goes, "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." NLP empowers that change.

*'Learn, discover, see what you can be.
Notice the change with NLP!' ■*

Lucy Heary is an NLP Master Practitioner living in Ireland. She began teaching in the last century (!) and has worked in mainstream classrooms, learning support and music education. Now a learning coach, Lucy loves to help children who learn differently develop more self-belief and empowering strategies. She is currently completing her Trainers' Training in the emotional intelligence programme, Magical U. Lucy is happy to connect anytime: lucy@learningcoach.ie or for further reading: www.magical-u.com and www.empoweringlearning.co.uk