

Magician's Apprentices

Helping Learners become Masters of their own learning and destiny

By Paul Penney

As a teacher in a busy and popular secondary school in Hampshire I used to feel that I was the foreman on a factory floor; obsessed with assessment, results and league tables. That was until I discovered NLP. Now I am like a magician in front of class full of eager apprentices desperate to learn the magic; my colleagues looking on curiously, wondering how I am getting such positive results in my teaching.

The question is, "How did this journey begin and what's happened in these early stages of my pursuit of the real education of the nation's children?"

My journey with NLP began a little over two years ago when a friend undertook the NLP practitioner's course and came back full of amazing stories and skills. I knew that I wanted to learn more. I had been recently appointed to a new role within school as Director of a department called Preparation for Life; looking at developing life and learning skills in every child. I had several meetings with the Head-teacher explaining NLP and my belief that it could be what I needed to make the department work.

I chose to do my Practitioner Training with Tim Fearon and Emma Sargent of The Extraordinary Coaching Company based in the New Forest. My world turned upside down and I realised that all my thoughts and ideas about education were not just idealistic fantasy, but could be a reality. I returned to school an NLP Practitioner and my adventure really began.

The initial impact was on my attitude and dealings with students with behaviour issues. What an eye-opener to realise that state is a choice, and not something outside of our control; just passing this new learning on to these students has made an extraordinary difference to them and an interesting dynamic to my pastoral care duties. Initial interventions changed too, as I began to listen and build rapport and then respond using the preferred modes of communication of the students and staff involved in conflicts.

I will always remember the look on the face of a persistent offender, who found that he could truly understand me and that I, in his words, spoke his language. We engaged in developing a series of strategies that helped him to trigger a new positive state for his arrival in maths lessons and some new questions that he could ask the specific teacher so that he could get the answers to his questions and not feel like he was a stranger in a strange land. When I next met the teacher she asked, "What have you done to James?" I was, of course, delighted to explain and was able to share some simple language tips with her as well as some alternative ways of

asking questions. So the magic began to be cast and the curiosity of staff was stimulated.

Curriculum planning was the next area that I began looking at and how to bring the principles of NLP into the teaching and learning opportunities of all students and staff. The government agendas were extremely useful in my initial implementation of key elements of the schools preparation for life learning programme. The Every Child Matters and Personalised Learning agenda were excellent vehicles by which to weave the magic of NLP into learning and teaching programmes. Using themes from personalised learning I began to engage the year seven students in understanding their "Emotional Intelligence". We looked at personal responsibility, our outlook on life, overcoming obstacles and failure, planning and personal development. Using a range of NLP tools, students explored how and what makes them feel the way they do and how they can change it. As I write, these programmes are underway. I know that this magic works and that children are fascinated by it and prepared to take risks to get different results.

Year eight and nine students have been focusing on communication skills and how and why we get what we get or don't get what we want. These patterns and behaviours are studied within the context of our drugs, alcohol and personal relationship education. The feedback from students so far has been interesting. Students feel that they are more able to say what they want and what they don't want, as well as how to say that effectively and confidently.

In years ten and eleven we have focused the learning on future focus – what do they want in their lives and how do they get it. In these sessions we have used a range of techniques and seen students accessing resourceful states in a number of areas in their lives including career plans, interview confidence, overcoming nerves and fears, exam states and communication and rapport skills. The students particularly enjoyed the "Timeline" strategies,



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using these to create a positive outcome state and future focus in a time of uncertainty and economic woe.

These sessions have been full of surprises and magic, as is the world of NLP. These curious minds begin to question lots of things that they have held to be true, and the presupposition that the map is not the territory is proved true every time.

In a recent lesson around alcohol we were exploring the notion of habits and how to change them. It was also the day that the year ten students were due to have their immunisations. Two students happened to mention that they could not concentrate on their work because they were afraid of needles.

Before I realised it, we had run through the fast phobia cure and each of the students, when future paced, felt totally fine and went on to have their injections feeling cool calm and collected. This is just one of those unexpected magic moments that occur with NLP and naturally curious, open young people.

Staff have become, at the same time, increasingly open to the use of NLP and its effect on students in teaching and learning. Fortunately, the senior management team gave me an opportunity to demonstrate the simple principle of state, and the effect of state on our experience and physiology. I did this in a full staff meeting and then offered a series of

training sessions for all staff using what I had learned from my Practitioner training and Richard Churches and Roger Terry's book 'NLP for Teachers.' These sessions were well attended and I am going to repeat them on a regular basis to all new staff and as a refresher for those who have attended. Again in these sessions, the magic of NLP was seen as people did a simple reframing of a situation that was a minor irritant and frustration. Many of the participants saw real changes in their personal lives and in the lives of the students in the classroom.

My journey through the world of education has only just begun and it has been full of adventure and excitement already. The curiosity of the young apprentices in my care never ceases to amaze me. I hope that as many more fast track teachers are given the NLP skills to be successful teachers, they will realise that these skills can be taught to their students. This can and will change the world of teaching and learning from being a results driven factory to a world where rapport, communication and learning are open to all.

Equipping all for a life of curiosity with a hunger for lifelong learning and aspirations for a life that they really want, is surely what education is all about. ●



If you would like to learn the skills that Paul uses in school to help change and enhance the learning of your pupils, you can contact Paul on 'paulpenney48@yahoo.co.uk'. Paul will be running a one day workshop in May for teachers with Emma Sargent of The Extraordinary Coaching Company, NLP Trainer and Author of "Flying Start – coaching your children for life". Please phone FREE on 0800 756 6516 for details.