Time on Task:
NLP in schools

Roger Terry and Richard Churches tell Joanna Goodman how NLP training for teachers is helping to deliver excellence in the classroom

I n his 2007 Ashby Lecture on 'Happiness and Values', Professor Lord Layard called for a new generation of teachers specialising in 'emotional intelligence'. 'NLP for Teachers' is a one-day course developed by Roger Terry and Richard Churches. It trains teachers to harness their emotional intelligence to communicate better, reduce disruption and get the best out of all their students.

I caught up with Roger and Richard at the end of the course. In addition to the enthusiastic response they received from the 60-odd delegates, the fact that schools and local education authorities are willing to pay for their teachers to attend this course is testament to its effectiveness.

Roger and Richard both have strong academic backgrounds and their education and NLP credentials no doubt help them to connect with their educated and articulate audience.

Roger is a biochemist by training and an NLP Master Trainer. His company, Evolution Training, offers NLP courses at Diploma, Practitioner and Master Practitioner level. He has worked with many challenging schools and has trained hundreds of teachers to use NLP skills in the classroom. Richard, who is studying for a PhD in NLP and leadership at Surrey University School of Management, is Principal Consultant for national programmes at CfBT Education Trust, a worldwide education consultancy. His role involves creating and commissioning national training programmes for teachers, including the Fast Track teaching programme, which is an accelerated leadership programme for graduate teachers.

A positive environment for learning

Research shows that the best teachers always retain their students' attention and find ways to create a positive learning environment. How does NLP help them achieve this? "We train teachers to control their own emotions through state management. We also work with Milton model hypnotic language patterns which are effective in the classroom as they help teachers gain compliance without an argument" says Roger.

Time on task

Time on task is another critical success factor. Highly effective teachers spend more time teaching and less time managing their class. But there's not a lot of advice out there about how to go about achieving that. 'NLP for Teachers' helps teachers acquire the personal skills to bridge that gap. "The idea is to generate time on task," says Richard. "If you're wasting time gaining compliance and dealing with difficult behaviour, you are losing critical teaching time."

Teachers can get into a downward spiral where they're constantly telling students off instead of teaching them. NLP offers strategies that help them subtly gain the compliance of the whole group in a way that doesn't slow down learning. "We work with teachers on basic NLP skills such as creating rapport with individuals and groups," says Roger. "Increasing your sensory acuity through NLP helps you pre-empt potentially difficult situations so that you can really be master in your own classroom."

Using perceptual positions to deal with bullies

Bullying in schools is a serious problem that attracts a lot of media attention. However, many schools' anti-bullying strategies concentrate on the victims and their feelings. The bully is generally punished or excluded. "This means that the bully thinks about the school punishing them and doesn't move on in terms of understanding," observes Roger.

'NLP for Teachers' offers teachers specific strategies to address bullying at its source: by changing the bully's attitude. One technique that uses perceptual positions has been successful in several schools. "It involves working with bullies to help them empathise with others and encourage them to change their behaviour," explains Richard. "It's a quick way of making them reflect on what they did and engage with their victim."

There are three basic perceptual positions:

1. You
2. The other person
3. A detached observer

The technique involves taking the bully through the three perceptual positions, using

different areas of the room to take a bully through the first position, what it's like to be them; and the second position – what it's like to be the victim. Thirdly, you take them through what it's like to be a teacher or another pupil watching the whole process. "Compelling a bully to look at an incident from different points of view is a really powerful way of getting through to them," says Richard.

Richard and Roger explain how this technique can be applied to a variety of classroom situations.

First position is best for giving praise and rewards as it shows that you really mean it.

Second position is good for asking questions in a way that draws out learning. It is also the best position for lesson planning – look at the subject from the children's point of view and think about what will engage them. Roger comments "it's what brilliant teachers do automatically. NLP gives teachers the tools to model what brilliant people do and achieve that excellence."

Third position is useful for dealing with misbehaviour. Instead of reacting emotionally, it enables a teacher to reinforce rules without eliciting emotional responses.

"Teachers' natural perceptual position is second: they choose teaching because they want to make a difference." He explains that if you stay in second position you become a doormat. If you stay in first position, you can get very emotional and self-centred; if you stay in third, you can become detached and unemotional. So the answer is to remain flexible. "It's classic NLP training," adds Roger. "The person with the most flexibility controls the system."

NLP and neuroscience

Roger and Richard are enthusiastic about connecting NLP to the latest neuroscience research. Ten years ago there was little scientific evidence for NLP, but recent research using MRI scanning has produced findings that support its effectiveness.

He offers three examples:

1. Research into mirror neurones suggests evidence for sensory acuity, rapport and modelling. Recent research has shown that people on the autistic spectrum have dysfunctional mirror neuron networks.
2. Internal representations and mental rehearsal are acknowledged to have a positive effect on performance.
3. Hypnotism and hypnotic language are also acknowledged as influential techniques. Recent research has clearly shown that hypnotic language affects the brain.

The biochemistry of NLP

A biochemist by training, Roger is interested in how NLP techniques such as anchoring ❯

Ten Top NLP Techniques for Teachers

1. Use spatial anchoring for different areas in the classroom –this can help condition group responses from the children you teach.

2. Use perceptual positions for dealing with bullying.

3. Develop your rapport skills– when to have it and when not to. Managing difficult pupils and parents.

4. Use 'Yes sets' and influential language in the classroom.

5. Know Satir categories – these are particularly useful for parents' evenings

6. Visualise outcomes – how you want the children to be in your classroom, not just what they're going to learn.

7. Use well-formed outcomes – for lesson planning. At the end of this scheme of work, ask yourself, 'What am I going to see, feel and hear the children doing?'

8. Awareness of chunking up and chunking down in questioning. Do you go up to the detail or look at the bigger picture? It's important to move between the detail and the big picture as well as across categories to encourage higher-order questioning.

9. Learn Milton model language to embed commands.

10. Learn hypnosis for relaxation. You can also embed learning and understanding with metaphors and stories and to create and embed states. This is great for assemblies.

can enable us to change the chemicals in our body and consciously change our state.

"When we are stressed or angry our body produces a specific combination of chemicals," he says. "Eventually, we get addicted to those chemicals and our cells produce more receptors for them. When you fire an anchor, you flood your body with a new set of chemicals and change your state. Building resourceful anchors and deploying them regularly means the anger or stress will fade and become less prevalent."

Anchoring helps teachers take control of their own emotions and this helps them deal with difficult situations in the classroom, avoiding what is known in emotional intelligence circles as 'amygdala hijack'. Roger explains that the amygdala is the part of the brain that deal with emotions. In emotionally charged situations, it can hijack the brain and flood the body with stress hormones. At the same time, the neocortex is working to control feelings in order to reappraise situations and deal with

> ❝ *Highly effective teachers spend more time teaching* ❞

them more effectively. NLP gives teachers tools that help them physically bring their feelings under control and deal with difficult situations. Their forthcoming book includes 'research zones' which outline the science that underpins their thinking.

Again flexibility is the key. "We've been teaching teachers anchoring processes that enable them to recall any state they need," says Roger. "This means that they tend to get less frazzled at the end of the day. Instead of soldiering on, they're learning to take control by choosing how they're going to be."

Richard and Roger have adopted a similarly flexible approach to developing 'NLP for teachers'. "It's a learning journey for us too," says Richard. "It started off as a classic NLP Diploma course. We then asked teachers to tell us what they found most useful and concentrated on those elements. Roger adds that by the end of 2007 approximately 1,000 teachers will have completed the course.

NLP for Teachers: How to be a Highly Effective Teacher by Richard Churches and Roger Terry will be available in December from Crown House Publishing. ●
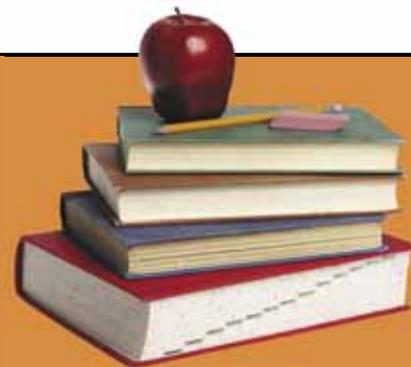
CASE STUDY
Head Teacher Liz Robinson

Liz Robinson is head teacher of Surrey Square junior school in Southwark, an inner London state primary school with 240 children aged between 7 and 11. She manages 45 staff, including teachers, premises management and catering staff.

Liz first encountered NLP on the Fast Track accelerated leadership programme. She then went on to complete her Practitioner in January 2007. Liz outlines some of the ways NLP helps her manage the multitude of different tasks involved in running a busy primary school.

1. ON A PERSONAL LEVEL
As a head teacher, Liz has to deal with children, parents and staff on a day-to-day basis. "Being a head is an enormous job with lots of potential negative energy," she says. "I have to deal with masses of information and a huge variety of tasks as well as handling lots of people and their different emotions. Primarily, I use NLP to manage my own state and to create an atmosphere in which I can feel supported and calm," she explains. "The key tools are around anchoring, state management and self-awareness."

2. STAFF COACHING AND DEVELOPMENT
Liz does individual one-hour coaching session with each of the seven members of her senior leadership team once every half term. As well as using NLP to deliver more effective coaching, she has taught teachers specific NLP techniques such as anchoring, which has proved particularly useful in conflict situations around behaviour management. "I've taught them how to use positive anchors to get them in a good state when dealing with tricky situations," she explains.

3. WORKING WITH CHILDREN
"Children are sent to me when they've misbehaved and I use NLP a lot in that context," says Liz. "For example, I have different spatial anchors in my office. So if I need to tell children off, I do it in a certain place and adopt a certain style. If children come to me for good reasons, I'll be in a different part of the office."

4. DEALING WITH BULLIES
Bullying is a challenge for many teachers. Liz uses perceptual positions to help bullies to see things from a different perspective. "The power of perceptual positions is in getting the bully to be the other child," she explains. "It's not just a matter of saying, 'How do you think it feels for them?' I actually get them to act out the incident. I say, 'Sit in this chair and be yourself.' I then get them to sit on another chair and be the other child. Questions like, 'What does it look like from their point of view?' and 'What do they feel?' produce a shift in their experience."

Liz introduces anchoring to children with anger management issues. "I set up positive anchors by getting them to think about times when they felt really calm or really happy," she says. "I then work with them to find ways to trigger that feeling the next someone is getting on their nerves or calling them names. Instead of calling them a name back, I teach them to think of a colour or a word that will bring back a happy state."

5. CONFLICT RESOLUTION
NLP also helps Liz to resolve conflicts involving parents and/or staff. She applies anchoring, state management and Satir gestures, adding that language is key to conflict resolution.

6. TEACHING AND PEDAGOGY
Liz is currently working on applying NLP to teaching and pedagogy – an area that she believes has huge potential.

Finally, Liz emphasises that she is careful not to push NLP per se in the classroom, preferring a more gradual approach. "The jargon can be off-putting," she says. "When I teach my staff a technique such as perceptual positions, they don't need to know what it is called or the theory behind it unless of course they choose to explore further. From the staff point of view, I'm more interested in their being able to use it in practice." Nonetheless, NLP is catching on fast at Surrey Square junior school. The fact that two members of her staff joined Liz on the 'NLP for Teachers' course is testimony to the effectiveness of her efforts.