



# Feng Shui in the classroom

**Richard Churches and Roger Terry** help you to discover how reorganising the learning space can make a real difference in your classroom

**H**ave you ever wondered why that comfy old armchair feels just so good and relaxing and why, as you sit there reading this, those same good feelings could come over you right now? In NLP we call this anchoring. Anchoring happens when an emotional state, or process, is so strongly associated with a word, a touch, a place, a sound, smell, taste or an image that your current internal state is changed to match the remembered one. Convinced? Stop, for a moment, and recall a time when you were really happy and allow yourself to be there once more ...that's right ...as you do that, you can notice how those same feelings are here again with you, right now...

There are many ways to anchor positive states of mind. In this article we are going to look at 'spotlighting' and how this can help you to organise your classroom environment – rather like a director on a film set.

## Spotlighting

A spotlight is a place in your learning space where you have a positive association with a particular

internal state or personal strength. Associating that space on the floor with these positive states will allow you to return to chosen feelings and a state of being, whenever you want to. Just like the comfy old armchair. For example, you could have an anchored state for relaxation, one for feeling energized and one for dealing with behaviour calmly and effectively.

Having spotlights also affects your learners. It works like this. By consistently adopting a particular behaviour or approach when you stand or sit in one place, your learners will begin to associate that space with what you are about to do and what will happen next. Your learners' own internal state will change in anticipation for what they know, from experience, will come next. As their internal state changes so will their behaviour. This works for adult learners in a training environment just as well as it does with children in the classroom. If you have already read about, or studied NLP, you may have come across this technique as the 'Circle of Excellence' or 'Spatial Anchoring'. Other useful spotlight states could include:

- the place where you always ask questions (with



an internal state of curiosity, openness and interest)

- the place that says: *this is going to be the plenary when I draw the lesson to a close or set homework* (with an internal state of confidence and business-like certainty). When Richard was an AST, he used to like to do this sitting on the edge of his desk. Sitting there always said, 'time for homework!'

Another good idea would be to have a behaviour management space (calm, congruent, confident and in charge). Having a place like this can be particularly effective for both our own state management and also as a signal to students. If well marked out, through experience, just going to that place, pausing and looking at the students can have a significant impact!

### Directing your classroom experience like a film set

Spotlights are just part of a stage performance, the set and direction are just as important.

In earlier articles in **TEX** ('Don't Think of Chocolate Cake' and 'Streetwise Body Language'), we explored influential language patterns and other aspects of communication, including body language. When teaching or training, non-verbal communication extends beyond our gestures and body posture to our environment (including the space in which we are teaching). All non-verbal information is also recorded by students, as part of the learning experience. A useful metaphor would be to think of yourself as a film or theatre

director, whose outcome is to create the most memorable performance you can (you are, of course, the leading actor).

### Making a film for young minds

When we watch a film we like to make sense of what is going on. If the plot is too complicated, unstructured or full of irrelevant detail, we can

### Creating Spotlight states

1. In your mind draw an imaginary circle on the floor in front of you.
2. Remember experiences where you felt powerful, creative, composed, or any other resourceful state where you were balanced and centred.
3. Step into the circle only as quickly or slowly as you need to. Remember and re-access the resourceful state through your inner senses.  
In other words:  
*See what you saw through your own eyes, within the actual experience... hear the sounds and language used and get in touch with your posture, breathing and emotions when inside the desirable resourceful memory. Note that an observer would see changes in your physiology such as better posture, deeper breathing, and skin colour changes. If there is no noticeable change in your physiology the resource state is either poorly accessed or low intensity. If it is low intensity, choose another resourceful state that is more powerful.*
4. You can continue to repeat step 3, adding other different resourceful states if you like. When you step back into the space you will be able re-access the positive feelings and states of being that you anchored there.
5. You can take this imaginary spotlight and use it whenever you need to, or you can set up spotlights in specific places in your classroom.

Remember you can choose to build spotlights with any number of different internal states and for any positive purpose!

get confused and switch off. A film director pays as much attention to the big picture as to the smallest detail. Teachers can use the same principle in the classroom to create a cinema of the mind for students.



**Three easy steps to a more orderly learning environment**

**1. Imagine your classroom as a film set.** Everything is set up for maximum impact and everything has a purpose. You can even go and sit down as a student and consider your class from a different perspective.

How orderly is it?

Does everything have a place?

Are books in line or dishevelled?

Can you make the room more tidy, balanced and purposeful to help focus minds?

Creating order on the outside helps create order on the inside. It's like coming home to a tidy rather than a messy home.

**2. Pretend you are on stage and consider how you use your space.** Where do you stand when you teach? Do you walk around while you talk or do you stand still and use different spaces in the room for different effects? Where are your spotlights? Are your subliminal messages one of order or chaos? As we learnt earlier, the repetition of your behaviour in certain 'spots' in the class will help you train pupils' unconscious minds to react in different ways.

**3. Play your part and maintain the film set in good order.** As your students get used to a structured room and your new spotlights, they will become more conditioned to learning in a more peaceful and orderly way. You can start the film rolling from the moment they step into class.

Research by G A Miller<sup>1</sup> in the 1950s, established that the human brain consciously processes only five to seven pieces of information at any one time. For most of us, this is reduced to three to five, unless we are very engaged in what we are doing. So how can knowing this help you in the classroom?

Unconsciously, we process up to 3 million pieces of information per second. This includes all signals from our heart, lungs and hormone system as well as all tactile sensations from our environment such as the feeling of feet in shoes, our back against the chair, different sounds and light levels around us. At any given moment our brains are taking in a lot of information, so it's easy to understand how students get distracted or lose focus in lessons. Our brains are designed to create a sense of order out of everything.

**You can test this out for yourself**

How do you like to work best?

Do you like a messy or neat desk?

Do you need everything to be straight before you focus on the task in hand?

Can you work in your own mess but need to put someone else's clutter to one side before you work best?

We all like to create order out of chaos. Even our own chaos has order to it. So the more we set up the conditions for learning, the easier it is for young brains to learn. It's a bit like creating a film – a film in your mind for students. **TEX**

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1. Miller, G. (1956) 'The Magical Number Seven Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity to Process Information'. *Psychological Review*: 63; 81-97