

# Action Research

ACTION RESEARCH: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'



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# 2008

# **Improving students' learning through visualisation**

**Stamatia Mukherjee**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this research was to use VISUALISATION for learning in the framework of NLP in order to find out whether meditation, for example in form of visualisation can train concentration, improve memory and reduce stress. Neuro-linguistic programming is an interpersonal communication model and an alternative approach to psychotherapy (Bandler and Grinder, 1975). Bandler and Grinder aimed to discover and model the successful pattern of behaviour and communication through modelling Perls' gestalt therapy, Satir's family systems therapy and Erickson's clinical hypnosis.

The idea behind this project evolves from the theory that only a 'switched-on student' is an effective learner. I fully agree with Maguire when he states that "... it's about how we do things. NLP in Education tells us about how we, ourselves and our students, think and learn. It does this by enabling us to explore the structure of our subjective experience: how we construct the view of our world." (Maguire 1996).

Different meditations have been developed by a variety of researchers, but I am mainly referring to Dr Caroline Mann, NLP master practitioner and coach, specifically to her PhD thesis where she carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis on the effects of meditation on primary school children (Mann, 2000). I was inspired by her work through a one-day professional development course "train your Brain using mediation and visualisation" that took place at our college in February 2007.

The results of her research were so impressive that I thought if Mann's pupils improved their intelligence by 5% no matter what their ability was initially, visualisation might have some positive effect on sixth formers too. It would take 2 minutes in the beginning of each lesson in form of a guided meditation to take the students through a variety of scenes that have specific aims.

### **Aims**

My main aim was simply to have switched-on students who can maximise their learning. The criteria for success would be when students find positive outcomes in using visualisation, when they see an improvement in their concentration, self-discipline and change of emotional state and when they can honestly say that they have become more switched-on learners. I am fully aware that qualitative data is my main source to draw conclusions from. I decided that I did not want to put students through lengthy intelligence tests that would interfere with my teaching as well as the students' time and willingness to undergo such procedures for number crunching purposes. Mann's research is to me more than convincing and I wanted to apply some of her ideas to my students. In theory, the benefits of visualisation would have the following benefits:

- Introduce learning themes
  - Enhance memory
  - Change emotional state
  - Dissolve emotional blocks
  - Engender deep relaxation
  - Increase self-awareness and self-confidence
  - Facilitate self-discipline
  - Set effective goals
- (Mann, Training course 2007)

### **METHODS USED**

As I was going to teach two parallel A2 groups in the academic year 2007/08, I randomly chose one of the groups to work with. The other group was intended to be the peer group to compare my findings with.

I intended to collect data of qualitative nature in form of discussions with the students and informal feedback, questionnaires, and comparisons with peers of the same average GCSE scores once I had done A2 mock exams.

In the beginning of October 2007 I presented my project ideas to the students to find out whether they were willing to follow me on this research journey as it would involve visualising in the beginning of every lesson for the next seven months.

The majority of the students found the idea of being involved acceptable, even exciting, to be at the centre of research that had not been tried with their age group as Mann's research is based on primary school pupils. Her work, in my view, is closer and more applicable to the environment I am working in than work done e.g. in the field of sports (Davis, 2005 and Friedmann, 2002).

### **Gaining consent**

The class agreed to start each lesson with a guided meditation and if anyone was late, they would quietly sit at their place to avoid any disruption.

There were also a few sceptics whose main subjects at college are sciences. These pupils rightly questioned the measurability of this project, but happily accepted to participate and see what would happen. Only one out of seventeen students refused to join the visualisation very early on but she was fine just to sit quietly through these two to three minutes. Her reason for rejecting this was "I simply don't believe in it – it's not for me" which is perfectly acceptable too as there was never the intention to force any of the students to participate or feel uncomfortable doing so.

Rules regarding the daily management of this project were discussed and agreed with the class. In order to visualise successfully though, the students had to be introduced to the deep breathing technique (Mann 2000) and an ideal posture. In addition, and this almost goes without saying, the students were requested to close their eyes. The students caught on very quickly to this technique but a significant number of students expressed that sitting up straight on their chairs with their feet parallel touching the floor was uncomfortable. One student was very adamant not to accept the suggested posture. His comment "it feels unnatural to sit like this and if I feel like this, I won't be able to visualise". Although I could empathise with his feeling I wanted to do this 'by the book' and I was even more determined to insist on Mann's suggested breathing technique and posture. I kept reinforcing the idea that only breathing into the whole lung would maximise their benefit but I also accepted participating students who were still slouching and leaning their heads on their desks.

### **Application and choice of guided visualisations:**

As it was the beginning of the year, we started by setting some goals and for one week (three sessions) I used the guided visualisation THE ARROW (appendix 1) to introduce the theme of setting goals:

*Imagine that you have a bow and arrow in your hands. Feel your feet and legs solidly in contact with the earth. Hold the handle of the bow with one hand and the notched arrow and string with the other. Experience the muscles of your arms extending as you bend the bow. Now see the target clearly and vividly in front of you. Watch the tip of the arrow pointing towards it.*

*The bow is now bent to its limit; the arrow is precisely aimed. Sense how much energy is stored in this static posture. All you need to do is release the arrow for that energy to carry it to its target. Realise how this letting go will release this dynamic energy.*

*Release the arrow! See its flight and feel its extraordinary one-pointedness. Nothing exists for the arrow except the target — no doubts, no deviations. Flying in a perfectly straight line towards the target the arrow hits the centre of the target and it stops there, quivering.*

*Now take a moment to think of a goal that you want to achieve. Imagine that the target is the end of term and you have achieved that goal. Calmly and confidently raise the arrow, with the goal attached to it, and let it fly through the air towards the target. See it gleam in the sunlight and hit the target in the centre of the bull's eye. What a triumph you feel, you have achieved what you set out to do and it feels fantastic. Take a minute to feel that wonderful feeling of success and notice all the people around you cheering and clapping as you win the contest. You feel on top of the world and know that you can do anything that you set out to do if you really try. Come back into the room and open your eyes. (Adapted by Mann from Ferrucci 1982, p. 125)*

## **FINDINGS**

After a week students commented that initially, they found it hard to follow the imagery but by repeating this exercise, they could clearly see the 'arrow' flying through the air and hitting its target. On the other hand, one student mocked "well, that will give us all As". As an answer I asked the class to tell me who actually wanted to get an 'A' and ten out of seventeen students raised their hand to my surprise. Thereafter, we had a brief discussion about NLP and I found myself on slippery ground trying to explain to the students that when we want to achieve a goal, we can influence ourselves and that chemical reaction would take place in the human brain leading to a change in behaviour. But that time, I had clearly taken my optimism a little too far judging by the number of smiling faces in the classroom.

For the next six teaching weeks, I introduced a different theme for visualisation: THE BUTTERFLY for promoting self-awareness and self-esteem (Mann, adapted from Ferrucci, 1982), THE BEACH AT SUNRISE to stimulate visual imagery and happiness (devised by Mann for her PhD research), A VISIT TO THE WISE OLD MAN (adapted by Mann from Hall and Hall, 1989) for inner control and inner authority as well as to find answers, THE SPECIAL PLACE (originally devised by Mann for MEd research 1995) for internal refuge and relaxation and A WALK IN THE WOODS (adapted by Mann from Fugitt 1983) for happiness and relaxation. All these guided visualisation can be found in appendix 1 a-f.

Feedback from the students was encouraging and they wanted more visualisations. Some students didn't like for example the imagery of THE BUTTERFLY 'being in a cocoon developing into a butterfly' whereas one student began to be a butterfly and moving her as if they were wings.

Another student expressed that she disliked THE BEACH AT SUNRISE as its imagery of walking barefoot on the sand made her uncomfortable affirming "I hate getting sand between my toes".

Questions like 'How did this visualisation make you feel' were generally answered with "It made me quite sleepy", "I feel very relaxed", "more visualisation instead of lesson", "I feel I can concentrate now" and "I feel ok" lead to the conclusion that generally, we were doing a worthwhile exercise.

### **Interim findings:**

When the themes were repeated in week eight of this project, some students seemed to get bored and suggested after two repeated visualizations that I should make up more themes. I decided thereafter, to ask the students to choose which meditation they wished to do in the beginning of each lesson. Also, when I forgot my script on the last lesson before the Christmas break, a couple of students reminded me that we should do the visualisation which clearly shows to me that at least some of the students found our newly gained habits necessary and important.

Before we broke up for the Christmas reading weeks, I suggested to the students to keep visualising also at home and to my surprise, several students deemed it a good idea if I was to record myself so that they could make use of it at home. Yes, that could have been a possibility, but imagining any student listening to my voice at home made me feel rather uncomfortable. I had decided though to give all the visualisations we had done as a hard copy to them at the end of the course for them to record their own voices and play it back to themselves.

When discussing informally after the first term whether the students felt a difference through our visualisation, we seemed to have reached a plateau of enthusiasm and the students were not sure whether it had really made a difference, apart from feeling more relaxed and that most of them enjoyed the relaxation.

### Final findings:

Finally, after so many months continuing to visualise, I could use the mock exams as quantitative data for the students' academic performance to be compared with the A2 control group. I found only 5 students in each class who had exactly the same GCSE score to compare against each other in the three papers for their final unit 6 German synoptic exam.

The results look as follows:

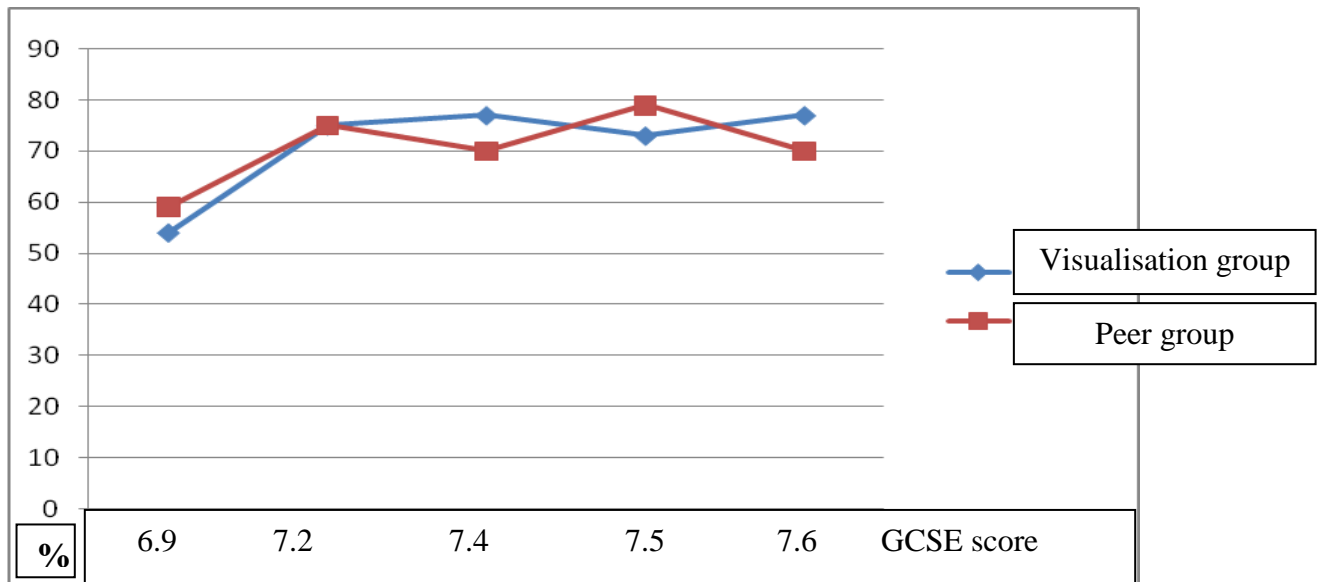
Mock exam past papers June 2007	6a) out of 35	6b) out of 25	6c) out of 40	Total
Student HS, 6.9	15	12	27	54%
Student TS, 6.9	24	13	22	59%

Mock exam past papers June 2007	6a) out of 35	6b) out of 25	6c) out of 40	
Student CR, 7.2	24	20	31	75%
Student HE, 7.2	30	17	28	75%

Mock exam past papers June 2007	6a) out of 35	6b) out of 25	6c) out of 40	
Student PO, 7.4	29	16	32	77%
Student RR, 7.4	29	13	28	70%

Mock exam past papers June 2007	6a) out of 35	6b) out of 25	6c) out of 40	overall %
Student BM, 7.5	28	16	29	73%
Student ER, 7.5	29	20	30	79%

Mock exam past papers June 2007	6a) out of 35	6b) out of 25	6c) out of 40	
Student RS, 7.6	27	22	28	77%
Student GJ, 7.6	31	14	25	70%



Each of the mini charts shows a comparison of a student who did the visualisation (in blue) and a student without visualisation (in black) from the control group. Both students have exactly the same GCSE score and are compared in the three sections of the exams with the total score in percentage shown at the very right. The graph gives an overview of the total performance in the mock exams with the GCSE score marked on the x axis.

Judging by this limited sample of five students who did the visualisation (in blue) in comparison to the five students who didn't do the visualisation (in red) for unit 6a which is listening comprehension, all students who were exposed to visualisation achieved less points. For unit 6b which is the reading comprehension three out of five students who visualised achieved a higher score, but for unit 6c which is the more lengthy part of the exam, the essay, four out of five students scored higher. For the overall percentage of this mock exam three students achieved higher and one had the same outcome as the students you never did the visualisation.

### Open ended response

What interests me even more than these numbers are the written comments by the students on what they thought of their whole experience of visualisation. I decided not to give them a final questionnaire in order to stop them from being guided or lead by my questions. I am very pleased that I made this decision as the comments are much more genuine. I gave each of the fourteen (out of seventeen) students present in that lesson a blank A4 sheet of paper to write down their views (appendix 2).

Judging by the comments, all students had some positive experience through visualisation and the initial aim, e.g. to relax through visualisation, to concentrate and to be in the right frame of mind has clearly worked for student who wrote in his/her own words without having read any theory about visualisation "Visualisation relaxes me before the lesson so I'm in the right frame of mind to work/concentrate. I like the wood/ beach visualisation, don't like the arrow."

On the other hand, students were also very open and critical offering constructive criticism like "It was quite relaxing but the focus never lasts all lesson."

### DISCUSSION

Are the mock results of only five students enough to draw conclusive answers quantitatively? Yes, to a certain extent as three out of five students achieved higher grades overall (by up to 7%),

but I am very reluctant to put this definitely down to visualisation. To me this is inconclusive because of several reasons. Firstly, I do not believe that students of the same GCSE score will develop equally in any subject. Also, my teaching experience of German made me aware that linguistic ability doesn't always match students' GCSE score. As we can see from the table, a student with a GCSE score of 7.4 can achieve as highly as a student with a score of 7.6. Secondly, the number of students evaluated is too small to draw a precise conclusion. Thirdly, the prove would lie in the actual A2 exams to see whether the students who did visualise improved on their mock results and if it really was an improvement, this research could be taken further and applied to a larger number of students.

My view here is if the results thereafter show that visualisation improves grades, I would have done the control groups without exposure to visualisation no justice by denying them the chance to visualise.

The written student comments are much more encouraging and we can see that all of the students had something positive to write. All of them felt better in some way after visualising. I also much appreciate their honesty pinpointing the individual challenges of the visualisation which is rather constructive for future use of guided meditation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Analysing the outcomes of this project, it has to be stressed that the limited number of students I had with exactly the same GCSE score makes it difficult to judge whether visualisation improves students' learning quantitatively although the comparison of these five students shows an overall tendency that the students using visualisation achieved slightly higher overall.

From the positive written evaluation from the students, I can clearly conclude that visualisation made a difference in how students feel about themselves, that they are less stressed starting the lesson and that a significant number of these students felt more switched-on, more able to focus and concentrate.

I have learned from this project that a better choice of visualisations would have improved the students' experience and possibly acquiring the techniques of creating more themes of guided visualisation can aid students to identify with the themes offered..

From my point of view as a teacher, I found that visualising can be used as a powerful tool to manage chatty students and take them closer to the aim of being switched-on. After the actual visualisation, the students are less chatty and distracted than before. For 90-minute lessons, it might be advisable to repeat the visualisation in order to keep up the feel-good factor and the concentration. I hope that at least some of the students will continue to visualise and take this experience away as a life-long skill.

Finally, Dr Mann's compelling evidence regarding "the cognitive and emotional benefits ... from the practice of meditation" (Mann 2000, p.287) would support our effective teaching as well as the students' learning experience. I fully agree with her when she maintains that "A shift from the blind overemphasis on the content of the curriculum, to a reinstatement of the importance of the state of the mind of the learner" should take place during our lessons.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Visualisations used during action research

**a) THE SPECIAL PLACE.** (Originally devised for MEd research, Mann, 1995).

Let your attention go to that part of your mind that imagines and creates. Know that it is a safe place and you are in control.

Imagine yourself walking down a path in a beautiful wood, picture it the way you want it to be — wide, narrow, winding or straight. Notice the feel of your feet on the path and the soft touch of the leaves as you brush past bushes and plants. Look up and see the blue sky with the sun streaming through the branches of the trees making a dappled light on the ground. Feel the warmth of the sun on your cheeks. It is a perfect summer day and the birds are singing all around you. Notice all the different greens of the leaves, the bright colours of the flowers and their warm scent as you pass by.

After a while you come to a fork in the path and the main track leads straight ahead but you decide to take the narrower path that goes off to the side. The path gets narrower and increasingly overgrown as if not many people come this way. At last the path leads into a clearing in the wood, a clear space surrounded by trees. In the middle of the clearing is a large strong tree with lots of thick branches which come down quite low to the ground. You will come to know this tree as the “trouble tree” (from Day, 1994 p.55) and it is there to take any worries or troubles that you may have. Take a moment to think of anything which is troubling you at the moment, however big or small. Clear them all out of your mind and hang them in turn onto the lowest branches of the huge tree. You don’t need these worries now. You know that you can come and collect anything you might need at another time. Walk away from the tree and feel the difference without your worries to weigh you down. You feel light and happy and without a care in the world. There is a spring in your step.

As you look around the clearing you notice, for the first time, a gate in the bushes at the far side. Walk over to the gate and gently push the flowers aside that are twined around the gate posts. Put your hand on the handle, what does it feel like? Turn the handle and carefully open the gate and go through. Inside is a magical garden that you know instinctively is your own special place and no-one else has ever been here before. Imagine the garden just the way that you would like it to be. Notice the grass, flowers, trees and bushes. Perhaps there is a stream running through it. Is there a boat moored by the bank? Notice the colours and the sounds in the garden. Picture everything just the way you want it to be. Are there any birds or animals? If there are, they will be friendly and excited to see you at last. Walk around the garden and touch and notice everything. Then at the far side of the garden you notice a house. It is your own special house. Take a moment to picture it the way that you have always dreamed it would be. It could be a cave, a hut, a cottage, a house or a castle. Notice its shape and colour, what is the roof made of and how many windows are there? Walk over the garden and up to the front door, what size is it? Put your hand on the door knob, what is it made of? What does it feel like? As you turn the handle the door swings open and you step into the hall of your own special house. Notice the colours and the furniture, if there is any. Can you hear any music? If you can, it will be your favourite sounds. All around you are your treasures and favourite things. The light is pouring through the windows and you feel as if you really have come home. Find a comfortable chair and sink into the soft cushions. You feel deeply relaxed and totally happy. It is a wonderful feeling to know that you can come here any time you need to, to be on your own and recharge your batteries. It is your place. Take three deep long breaths. You’ll now feel full of energy and peace. You slowly look around the room and then go to the front door and go out, closing it behind you. Walk through the garden looking around you. Then go through the gate in the hedge and close it behind you. You know that you can return there any time that you need to.

You are in the clearing and the trouble tree still holds your worries. If you really want them back, go and take them, knowing that you are now stronger to cope with them. Hopefully, you now realise that you don't need them and you are free of them. Slowly find your way back down the path through the wood, the sun is still warm on your face and the breeze gently blows your hair. You find yourself back in the room. Notice yourself sitting in the chair, the sounds of the room and your own breathing. You feel full of energy and happiness and able to cope with anything that the day may bring.

**b) A WALK IN THE WOODS.** (Adapted from Fugitt, 1983, p.55).

We are going to use that part of our minds that imagines and creates. As you breathe quietly, imagine that you are walking down a path in the woods. It is a friendly wood and it is a lovely day. The sun is shining and you feel its warmth on your face. A gentle breeze blows on you, feeling fresh and good. The sun sparkles on the leaves of the trees. The air smells good with an earthy scent. The ground feels firm under your feet and you rustle the leaves with your feet as you walk.

As the path curves you come to a lovely stream which looks cool and inviting. You sit on a rock beside the water that is just the right size for you to sit on comfortably. The stream is sparkling in the sun, bubbling and singing as it tumbles along. You could easily wade across the stream if you wanted to, but you continue to sit on the rock with your feet dangling in the cool water. You take a deep breath and simply enjoy the scene. All is silent and peaceful. You watch a leaf float down gently from a tree and glide and twirl in the stream. You can hear the birds sing all around you. You feel deeply happy and everything feels just right in the world. Now slowly get up from the rock and leave the stream. Take the path back through the woods that you came by and find yourself back in the room. Be aware of the chair you are sitting on and your feet touching the floor. Be aware of the sounds in the room and when you are ready open your eyes.

**c) THE BEACH AT SUNRISE.** (Devised for PhD research. Mann 2000)

Visualise yourself on a beautiful sandy beach. It is the moment just before dawn and the sky is a deep inky blue, studded with sparkling stars. A full silver moon is shining so that you can easily see your way. Notice what you are wearing and if you feel like it, take your shoes off (in your imagination) so that you can feel the sand between your toes. There is a cool breeze gently blowing on your face but you feel warm. Walk along the edge of the water and notice the white phosphorescent surf coming in ripples up the sand with a rhythmic "shooshing" sound. Smell the tangy scent of seaweed in the air and see the stars and moon reflected on the surface of the water.

Find a place to sit on the sand and feel comfortably warm and relaxed. As you watch, the sky gradually turns from velvety dark blue to a lighter blue along the horizon and you sense that the sun is coming up. The moon and the stars begin to fade as the sky gets lighter and lighter. The sun slowly appears on the horizon like a crimson red dome rising out of the sea. As it rises, the sun's rays bathe everything in a golden light and you feel a warm glow on your face. You feel really happy, relaxed and full of wonder at the beauty of the scene. You notice the sounds of the gentle waves breaking on the sandy shore and seagulls calling. You decide to go for a swim, and find that you have your swimming costume on already. You run into the water and swim in the warm sea, feeling the water on your skin as you float. At the same time watch the sun rising higher in the sky. It is becoming a perfect summer's day with a bright blue cloudless sky. You then swim back to the water's edge and climb out onto the sand feeling refreshed and full of energy. Dry yourself on a fluffy white towel and put your clothes back on. Slowly prepare to leave the beach by walking back along the sand to where you left your shoes and put them on. When you are ready, come back into the room and slowly open your eyes and notice everything around you.

**d) THE BUTTERFLY.** (Adapted from Ferrucci, 1982, p.1 21). Used to introduce the theme on self-esteem.

Imagine watching a caterpillar crawling about on the tree where it lives. Attaching itself to a branch of the tree, the caterpillar starts to form its cocoon. Gradually, it surrounds itself with a golden, silken thread until it is totally hidden. Observe the cocoon for a few minutes.

Now be inside the cocoon. Surrounded by the softness of silk, you rest in the warmth of the golden darkness. You are only dimly aware, so you do not know exactly what is happening to you, but you sense that in this apparent stillness a hidden, transforming energy is at work. At last the cocoon breaks open, and a ray of light penetrates through a chink. As the light touches you, feel a sudden surge of vitality and realise that you can shed the cocoon. You feel the cocoon fall away and with it any of the negative things that you may have felt about yourself in the past.

You have emerged from the cocoon as a beautiful multi-coloured butterfly. As you sit on the branch your wings unfold and beat gently in the air until you feel ready to fly off. You feel so free: full of energy and happiness as you fly being supported by the warm air and gently borne on the breeze, gliding this way and that. Below you see an immense field of flowers of every kind and colour. You settle on one and then another so gently that not even the petals are disturbed. You notice the colour and perfume of each flower. Take time to experience the many aspects of your freedom and lightness. Slowly float back to the tree and alight on the bark of the trunk and sit for a moment enjoying the warm summer air on your wings. You realise that you are a truly beautiful butterfly and there will never be another just like you. You are unique and special. Then become yourself again and appreciate everything about yourself.

Come back into the room and notice the sounds around and when you are ready, open your eyes.

**e) THE ARROW.** (Adapted from Ferrucci, 1982, p.125).

This is used to introduce the theme of setting goals.

Imagine that you have a bow and arrow in your hands. Feel your feet and legs solidly in contact with the earth. Hold the handle of the bow with one hand and the notched arrow and string with the other. Experience the muscles of your arms extending as you bend the bow. Now see the target clearly and vividly in front of you. Watch the tip of the arrow pointing towards it.

The bow is now bent to its limit; the arrow is precisely aimed. Sense how much energy is stored in this static posture. All you need to do is release the arrow for that energy to carry it to its target. Realise how this letting go will release this dynamic energy.

Release the arrow! See its flight and feel its extraordinary one-pointedness. Nothing exists for the arrow except the target — no doubts, no deviations. Flying in a perfectly straight line towards the target the arrow hits the centre of the target and it stops there, quivering.

Now take a moment to think of a goal that you want to achieve. Imagine that the target is the end of term and you have achieved that goal. Calmly and confidently raise the arrow, with the goal attached to it, and let it fly through the air towards the target. See it gleam in the sunlight and hit the target in the centre of the bull's eye. What a triumph you feel, you have achieved what you set out to do and it feels fantastic. Take a minute to feel that wonderful feeling of success and notice all the people around you cheering and clapping as you win the contest. You feel on top of the world and know that you can do anything that you set out to do if you really try. Come back into the room and open your eyes.

**f) A VISIT TO THE 'WISE OLD MAN.** (Adapted from Hall and Hall, 1988 p.167).

Find a position that is comfortable and relax. Take three deep breaths and close your eyes. Now imagine that you are going up a mountain path. You are walking through the forest in the foothills and you can smell the strong musky scent of the trees. (Pause).

A clear half moon lights up the branches and the foliage. The stars stand out clearly in the sky. (Pause).

The air is warm, but refreshed by a gentle breeze blowing up from the valley. (Pause).

How do you feel as you climb upwards? What are your thoughts? What are your expectations? (Pause) Now turn off the main path to follow a smaller rocky path which you know leads to the cave of a wise man. (Pause). This route is steeper and more difficult to climb and soon you begin to get tired and short of breath. (Pause). In the distance you can see a faint light which shows you are getting nearer to your destination and you begin to get a second wind. (Pause). As you approach you can see the wise old man sitting before the fire — the flames send flickering shadows into the cave and around the surrounding trees. The man beckons you to sit by the fire. He passes a cup of cool spring water to quench your thirst after the long warm climb. As you sit in silence, the old man occasionally stirs the embers of the fire. Ask him a question that is important to your life. (Pause). Listen to the old man's response and think about what it means. (Pause). Prepare to take your leave of the old man. As you stand, the old man reaches into the folds of his clothes and gives you a gift which is significant for you. You take the gift and examine it carefully. How do you feel about it? Say goodbye to the old man and slowly turn to find your way down the mountain path. Hold your gift carefully in your hands. Find your way back into the room and when you are ready open your eyes

## **Appendix 2**

### **Open-ended comment by the students (anonymous)**

"It is relaxing and helps you concentrate, but after a while the stories got a bit repetitive and that made it less interesting. It would be nice if we could personalise the stories more. At the moment they don't seem that relevant to us."

"It was quite relaxing but the focus never lasts all lesson."

"I don't like the position they tell you to sit in – it's painful and uncomfortable and it's then hard to concentrate. I find it better to sit in a comfortable position. I think they do help me focus + relax which is needed for me! It has helped me to think of what I actually wanted – the old man giving me a present where my grades all being 'As' so it's helped me to set my goals. Sometimes I couldn't be bothered to do visualisation as I was stressed and had other things to think about. But when I did it, I found I felt better."

"Sometimes it was relaxing but I don't think it's made a dramatic difference to my grade."

"I think that, on occasion, the visualisation really helped me to focus, but other times I couldn't concentrate on it. I think with a little more perseverance on the students' part, it can be very effective."

"Sometimes more time was needed – I was visualising one bit & wasn't finished before the next bit. I liked the woods because it was a nice break from reality. My versions generally got more personalised with friends turning up completely unintentionally. Occasional blips in pronunciation & stumbles in the text disrupted concentration and laughter brought reality crashing back."

"Visualisation relaxes me before the lesson so I'm in the right frame of mind to work/concentrate. I like the wood/ beach visualisation, don't like the arrow."

"I like visualisation, apart from the arrow one. Mostly visualisation relaxes me, and gives me positive thoughts because the words are nice. I don't like the arrow one because it isn't relaxing; it makes me think of PE at school."

"It was interesting new experiment, despite my first sceptical approach. It's a nice way to relax in the beginning of the lesson that makes atmosphere more relaxed and chilled. Some visualisations worked better than others (e.g. arrow and butterfly are a bit weird and harder to

imagine). Other visualisations are a bit difficult to imagine when it is freezing cold, and we meant to imagine a sunny beach.”

“I enjoyed the visualisation exercises as they are mostly good for creating a calm, quiet environment for a lesson making it easier to relax and concentrate. I liked how there is a good variety and how each exercise is aimed at a different area, but towards the end they became repetitive and we could have done with some more.”

“I actually really enjoy the visualisations. They help to calm me down before the lesson. I don't like the 'old man' one because I can never imagine what gift he would give me so it doesn't really work for me.”

“I didn't feel like it helped me, but it was a nice way to start the lesson.”

“I didn't find the specific visualisations helped (e.g. arrow for the goal setting). But I did feel slightly less stressed/ more focused after.”

“It helped me to concentrate for the lessons (more focused). However I did find some of the stories a bit boring/ not relevant.”