Neston Primary set off on their BLP journey by using TLO’s interactive questionnaire TrackingLearning:On-Line, from which pupils drew up their own profiles as learners.

Teachers saw managing distractions as a key capacity in the process of building absorption in learning, and then developed learning conversations with this focus.

Class groups used the feedback from the Resilience quiz in TrackingLearning:On-Line as the stimulus for thinking about how to manage distractions. Pupils set targets for themselves, and then reviewed their progress in discussion and by repeating the quiz.

Teachers used analogies from pupils’ daily worlds to help them realise that managing distractions had value, and could move them from the ‘bottom of the league of learning’ to be champions. They worked with pupils to identify distractions in the classroom and to come up with strategies for reducing them. They discussed:

- Issues which were not clear cut, such as friends who were both a distraction and a source of inspiration, and whether fiddling was a distraction or an aid to concentration
- Different learning environments that might be appropriate for different types of learning, both in school and at home
- Internal distractions, such as hunger, tiredness, emotions, failure.

Pupils discussed and ranked significant distractions — people, objects, the weather, the environment. They suggested ideas for managing these distractions and reviewed their experience of what worked. Many of the strategies they came up with addressed the emotional content of internal distractions. These included:

- Using their imagination to take themselves to a different place, a happy place, where they could block out the distraction
- Discussing how to deal with the situation with a friend so that the worry did not go round and round in their minds
- Thinking about how much worse a situation could have been
- Giving themselves time to laugh or cry about a situation if necessary before settling to a task.

Key actions: Staff ...

- started from the pupils’ own perceptions and made managing distractions a desirable skill
- asked coaching questions to draw solutions out from pupils and tackled ambiguous and sometimes difficult emotional issues
- gave pupils some control over the way they handled distractions in the classroom and outside
- included the ability to manage distractions in the range of achievements for which they gave rewards.

Outcomes

- Pupils manage their distractions better. They are more independent, autonomous and aware of themselves and other people. They try to sort out issues with their friends, recognise when they are not making progress and need a break, and are generally more resilient and more emotionally literate.
- Teachers spend less time on dealing with distractions. They have more time, and emotional energy, to facilitate learning and support individuals in making progress.
Other ways to nurture the capacity to manage distractions

- **Distraction Scale.** Work with pupils to describe different degrees of the ability to manage distractions. A 3-star manager might “always keep focused on what s/he is learning” and “Support other learners by helping them to manage their distractions”. Use language appropriate for the age of the pupils. Comment on behaviour to recognise and value the management of distractions. Ask pupils to help each other with ideas about how to earn more stars as distraction managers.

- **Background Music.** Play music with a tempo of 60 beats a minute at a very low volume while pupils are working. This can help to create a calm environment. Use music to set the atmosphere at the beginning of a lesson and to settle the class. Make this into an experiment. Discuss with pupils what sort of music helps them to concentrate or to think of new ideas, and what sort amounts to a distraction.

- **Visual Anchor.** In pairs or in groups, ask the pupils to identify the detail of their behaviour and feelings when they manage distractions well. Then ask them to draw a picture of themselves using this learning muscle and stick it on their desks to help them to remember to use this muscle. (NST)

- **Role Play.** Brainstorm ways of managing distractions with pupils. Ask them to create role-plays, in pairs or groups, about different ways to manage distractions. The whole class then watch each other’s role plays and the effectiveness of different strategies. Extend by writing reminders in thought bubbles for display. (BRM)

- **Break States.** Change the mental and physical state of the class by using music, quick games (Fizz-Buzz, Simon Says), guided relaxation, Brain Gym (Dennison, 1992), change of partner/desk/lighting, breathing exercises, or a refreshment break. Such activities refresh and relax pupils, enabling a greater degree of focus afterwards. Discuss their impact on concentration and how pupils could use them in other contexts to keep themselves on track with their learning.

When you use this learning muscle, you ...

- are aware of possible sources of distraction
- purposefully try to minimise distractions
- know what conditions help you learn
- settle back into learning quickly after an interruption

Language to encourage managing distractions

- What do you find gets in the way of your learning?
- What would help you to avoid these distractions?
- Do you need a break?
- How are you feeling? ... Is that getting in the way of your learning?
- What can we do to help you focus on what you want to do?
- What can you do to help focus yourself?
- How could you remind yourself to use your anti-distraction tactics?
- How could you let us know if we’re distracting you?
- Great! I noticed you went back to your learning quickly after that interruption.
- Who could you copy in the way they stay focused?
- Let your mind relax a little, take a deep breath and refresh yourself before going on.
- Imagine you are in a good place for learning. What is it like?

Sometimes when I get stuck with homework, I have a drink and a biscuit, then I come back to it.

Leo, Y6