

NLP Master Practitioner Project Write Up

On my own....

By Hayley Williams

How I discovered my 'it'

On the course in India, we were doing an exercise called 'walking in another person's moccasins'. The exercise meant that you partnered up with another individual and took it in turns to literally mimic everything the other person did. I partnered up with Danuga, who was in my mind, completely opposite to me. I found myself compelled to partner up with her. Funnily enough she later told me that she too had felt compelled for us to work together. Anyway, as part of the exercise I had to go off and just 'be' for a while, allowing Danuga the opportunity to walk in my moccasins. The problem was that I quickly discovered that I didn't know how to 'be'. I got frustrated, irritated and bored immediately and had no idea what to do with myself. My frustration was so extreme that when I saw another couple walk past, who were also doing the exercise, I seized the opportunity to talk with them, voicing my 'boredom' of having to be alone.

Perhaps it was in that moment, or more specifically in the look I received when I asked to talk, that flagged up how uncomfortable I felt being alone. The person, looked at me so bizarrely, like they couldn't understand what the issue was. It's funny, I can't remember who it was, but the feeling in that moment is still so real. I brushed it off and quickly walked in another direction. I remember how quickly I moved, walked, skipped around; trying to find something to do. I remember being so aware of my speed, I travelled so fast. Dashing to the restaurant to get some water (and I suppose knowing that there were people there), dashing back to the reception (reception staff there), dashing towards the front gates (doorman). Actually it is only now writing this that I realise that everywhere I went, I unconsciously knew people would be there. I moved so quickly in fact that I lost Danuga, she just couldn't keep up! To no surprise I went and found her. Alone was boring, unnecessary and lonely. What purpose was there in being alone?

When my 15 minutes were over (which seemed like an hour) it was then my turn to walk in Danuga's moccasins. As I stepped into her shoes, the world seemed to stand still. As I slowly walked around, my eyes began to open. Suddenly this world which had seemed so lonely, was suddenly so very interesting and surprisingly busy. Danuga stopped to look at a leaf, she stopped to touch it. I remember thinking "I wonder if she is just pretending to be interested to have something to do?" I hadn't even noticed the leaf. She then passed a decoration, and felt the need to touch it, curiosity all across her face. It was as if my eyes were suddenly opened to so much detail. Detail I hadn't even been aware of. It was very strange; my world had seemed so boring and lonely when I was on my

own. In Danuga's world, the very same space, the world was full of beauty and detail that would have kept her occupied for what seemed like forever.

My 'it'

So my 'it' is about being comfortable, satisfied and confident on my own and in my own space. I want to feel happy about being on my own. I want to be in control of my feelings of being alone.

My models of excellence

First model:

My first model of excellence just seemed so obvious. Danuga's comfort in her own skin, and more obviously in her own environment, was something I was just so curious to have. I asked her if I could interview her and ask her some specific questions, to try and discover the strategy she was running.

Danuga

I found Danuga sitting on a bench, looking at the water. I asked "wow so do you just go off and find quiet spaces?" she laughed, and explained that she had just got off the phone from her husband. I obviously had taken it too far. Still, if I had just got off the phone, I would have been long gone and off to find people. Instead Danuga was just sitting there. I asked her if now was a good time and of course she said yes. Danuga is such a kind and generous person, I doubt even if it had not been convenient she would have said. Her bright smile told me it was appropriate so I sat down. It was funny, I hadn't even noticed the bench, never mind sat in it before. Thinking back now, the bench was very close to the restaurant and my focus would always have been on the restaurant and all the people inside.

Also thinking about it now, when I read I can't stand authors who, in my map, go on and on about details when writing a story. The wood of the door..., the smell of the air..., the specific type of flower in the room... -ahhh! I always give up on the book. For me it's the characters in the book that are of interest. Until this moment I hadn't realised that.

Anyway, so I began to ask Danuga specific questions. She found the questioning quite amusing, and as I repeated back to her what she told me, she became even more amused. Giggling to herself, quietly gasping as I repeated it back to her. She would bring her hands to her face, covering her mouth as I spoke. She then gently rested her head on her clasped hands, while she listened and examined if I had correctly mastered the process. She would gently touch my arm and laugh as I got it right, giggling as I relayed what she had told me. The process was exciting and enlightening for me; Danuga smiled throughout amazed at the process.

The strategy:

Danuga explained to me that she can be on her own – any time, any where. I asked, “how can you be alone when you have others around you?” Danuga smiled and said this was easy. This amazed me. Easy? I didn’t like to be alone anytime, for what purpose would you want to be alone when you had others around you? It had never even occurred to me that you could be on your own when you’re with people. The concept seemed totally alien and something I had never experienced before.

Danuga explained that she would focus in on a sound that she had just heard, or something she had just seen. She would then allow it to become defocused. In this moment, or ‘her moment’ as she called it, thoughts would pop into her mind. She explained that she would just let them go into dialogue. As she explained this the palms of her hands faced each other and moved back and forth as if they were fighting each other. I then asked her how she knew it was time to no longer be in her moment? Danuga explained that when there is a break, she knows it is time to move on. A break can be anything that moves her out of her thoughts and back into reality.

I noticed that even as Danuga talked me through the process, her eyes looked very different, as she spoke about her moment, defocusing and going into dialogue. I remember even as I sat there taking notes her world seemed quiet, still and calm.

Brief structure of strategy:

- In my moment
- see something, hear something, focus in on it
- then defocus (I am to allow this to happen)
- Allow my thoughts to go into dialogue
- When there is a break – I know to move on

Second Model

My second model of excellence was Kate. Kate was someone who I knew really enjoyed spending time alone. I had heard her several times in conversation, speak about being alone, and how excited she got about it. At the time, I found this really bizarre, so I thought it would be great to examine it further.

Kate McCartney

To my amazement, when I began to speak to Kate, I discovered that she even had a name for being alone. She called it ‘pluttering’! I found it so interesting that something which I always tried to avoid, Kate had a special name for and

took delight in experiencing. How wonderful if I too could experience delight instead of dread, in such situations.

I asked Kate to remember specific times when she took part in this fluttering process. She remembered when Toby (her husband) had gone off on a stag do, leaving her to get on with all the things she wanted to do. She said she had from 10 am to 1 am to do whatever she wanted. I remember her pulling her legs up onto the chair that she sat on, and hugging them into her chest. She looked warm and cosy. I remember her then saying "Ohhh, I get excited just thinking about it". Kate smiled and began to look dreamy and relaxed.

Kate explained that the beauty of fluttering was that she could do things that were far too boring to do when others were about. For example, clean out cabinets, play with cosmetics, and eat plain food. She spoke specifically about eating plain 'cereal' and how she remembered doing this all the time at university. She explained that if others were around she would have much more interesting things to do. It therefore seemed for Kate, this fluttering was a time to do the mundane. Mundane however, is not an accurate word, as for Kate, excitement was the feeling that accompanied these 'chores' not boredom.

I asked if it was in doing these mundane things, that Kate gave herself the opportunity for self reflection. In quite stark contrast to Danuga, Kate was adamant that this was not about personal self reflection and time for inner dialogue. It was more about not having any responsibility. Kate explained that when she was on her own she didn't have to be anyone. She wasn't a 'wife' a 'friend' a 'boss' she could just 'be'. She had the whole evening to just be. Kate explained that being comfortable and just being were so important and fluttering gave her the time to do this. She explained that it wasn't that she didn't do anything, this wasn't a time of 'nothingness'. Having a 'nap' was still doing something, after all she was 'taking a nap'. Therefore the alone time, the fluttering time, was busy with things that Kate enjoyed to do, alone, by herself.

For me, this struck a cord. The excitement that Kate explained, the tone of her voice, the look in her eye, all implied this was something to be treasured, not feared. I began to imagine getting excited about the things I could do on my own. Putting a face mask on, sorting cupboards whilst listening to music that I enjoyed.

Brief structure of strategy:

Kate explained, the strategy that took place when she knew she could spend time alone:

1. A real sense of excitement
2. Lists begin to form of all the things I can now do
3. 'Great' – I can now get on with pluttering
4. When the alone time comes, I can just 'be'
5. Enjoy doing things that interest just me and no one else

Contrast between my two models of excellence:

Perhaps it was for cultural reasons, but my two models of excellence were very different. Danuga's time was about self reflection, giving her self time for internal dialogue. Danuga always started this process by focusing in on the objects around her, focusing in on an object, sound etc. Kate's was also externally referenced but in a different way. The pluttering time was externally referenced, through her comforts, food and environment, which led her not to personal reflection as far as she was concerned, but into a place where she had no label in society. Her pluttering gave her the time to just 'be'.

Having interviewed two women, I thought it would be interesting to get a male perspective on being alone and what that meant for him.

Third Model of excellence

My third model of excellence was my partner Mike. He thoroughly enjoys alone time. I was curious to know what it was about being alone that was so appealing. It was important for me to recognise that being alone wasn't about not wanting to be with me, but more about just wanting to 'be'.

Mike Hall

The first thing I noticed as I interviewed Mike was the huge smile he got across his face when I mentioned "spending time alone". His face beamed. He immediately came out with "oh it's so great, you have no body else to please but yourself." Mike explained that, "when I am actually on my own I get bored after a while, but the idea is really warm, nice and exciting". I asked Mike specifically what that warm and exciting feeling was like and he said it was a feeling in his chest. He did a head movement (like the Indian men and women do) and explained he got tightness in his chest and an excited feeling like 'ohhh'. Maybe it was because Mike could see that I was struggling to understand and take on board this concept, so he said to me "I imagine it's like how you feel just before you go to sleep, or when you know you can have a nap". Immediately my face beamed. I love naps, and love sleeping. For the first time, I really began to understand this excitement that both he and Kate had mentioned.

Mike explained that after the tightness in his chest he would get a little voice that said "ohhh you're going to be alone". The feelings for Mike were tight and

luke warm. I was curious to ask if being alone was about self reflection. He quite quickly replied with a definite "no" and then laughed. Mike explained being alone is simply about getting stuff done that needs to get done.

My other question for Mike was whether he could be alone when other people were around. I was quite surprised that Mike said even when he is with people he really likes, if he is tired he just goes off into "his own world" and is alone. Mike explained that he can quite easily just "zone out". He started to then tell me about when he goes swimming he often zones out, "I get inspirational moments when I swim...I discover how I am going to do things better, get thing done..."

I was curious to know what Mike meant by "zoning out" so I asked him. He told me that zoning out is when he doesn't pay attention to anything. He doesn't take in what people are saying. "It's a moment for me and my own thoughts; I can easily just switch off". This was very interesting as Danuga used objects to aid her in taking her moment for self talk. For Mike, his alone time was removing himself from situations where he might have to enter into dialogue.

I asked Mike "what does the word 'alone' mean to you?" He paused for quite a while. There were no physiological shifts, just searching in his eyes. "Alone is just being with yourself and being more into your own world. You are not aware of things around you and not aware of things outside of you. You can just be yourself with no pretences, no niceties".

Mikes structure behind his strategy

1. Big smile
2. Immediate feeling of excitement
3. Tight feeling in chest
4. Voice "ohh you're going to be alone"
5. Followed by luke warm feeling
6. Now I can just be – no pretences, pretending etc

The model:

Having studied three models of excellence I feel equipped to amalgamate my very own strategy for coping with being on my own. I have discovered that for me there are several different types of being 'alone' that I need to deal with. Firstly, I need a strategy for the thought of being alone, how to control my state and to feel comfortable with the idea. The second has developed from the dialogue with my models of excellence. They all highlighted the importance of what I would now call 'time out'. Having interviewed these models I can now see the importance of simply taking moments in the day just for myself. Moments where I am alone with my own thoughts, removed from day to day life.

The thought of being alone:

1. The first stage is to control my state when I know there is the opportunity to be alone (please note my language, I now see it as an *opportunity* rather than a curse)
2. I will smile and begin to allow excitement to enter into my chest, face etc (I can experience this even by writing it now)
3. I then am going to list all the things that I am able to do when I am on my own, these can include activities like ice skating, beauticians etc (getting excited just thinking about it)
4. More excitement emerges
5. I am going to hear a voice that says "oh I am going to be alone, I don't have to please anyone else but myself – how exciting"
6. I feel the need to laugh! (this is my own step, a natural occurrence when I follow these steps)

Day to day zoning out/ having a moment

1. See something, hear something, focus in on it
2. Try to just be aware of things inside you
3. Then defocus on objects (this cannot be forced, I am to just allow this to happen)
4. Allow my thoughts to go into dialogue or just zone out
5. Take a moment for myself.

Measurable outcomes & my learning's:

I think that since my family left for Australia in 2003, being alone has been more of an issue. It was very sudden. I went from living with my mum, dad, brothers and sister, to moving to Bristol, living alone and having my family the other side of the world – it was a harsh reality. Before my family left, being alone wasn't an issue. However, once they went it was as if being alone was forced upon me. Alone time gave me more time to think, remember and deal with issues that I did not want to face. Keeping busy meant I didn't have to do this.

I remember in India, watching a demonstration of time line and feeling very anxious. I did not feel comfortable 'going there' as it were. I remember speaking to Sue Knight and she said to me that if I were going to expect clients to trust me and deal with issues, it was probably a good idea for me to deal with my own. It was a feeling of real 'anxiety' in my chest. A heavy feeling. So I decided to go for it and I did 'time line' for this feeling of anxiety. My time line, circled all around me. It was like it was keeping me still. I dealt with a lot of issues and straightened out my time line (so to speak) and finished feeling a stone lighter. I think the presupposition which helped me most, was that 'people make the best choice they can at the time that they make it'. This imparts forgiveness and empathy, something which spoke volumes to me.

Having done this, I find I am much less teary and self reflection isn't such an issue. Thinking back now, I know I can be on my own, as I have run the business from home for the last 8 months and 'being alone' hasn't bothered me. I think what in fact was my problem was not being alone but being scared to take part in self reflection on my own. I had a lot of guilt and memories that I just wasn't prepared to deal with. However, after time line I remember feeling a 'stone' lighter, looking forward to my future and the anxious feelings have disappeared. I remember as my time line experience ended, I was left looking out onto a pond. As I lifted my head the pond actually flowed into a lake and the lake went on and on into the distance. The sun lit up the whole area and for the first time I was looking forward and beyond, my past was no longer wrapped around me, instead my future was all ahead of me.

I was working with a client the other day and we were doing time line (my favourite process now). It was very interesting because he was talking through some very emotional issues. Issues that prior to doing time line I perhaps would have found myself getting upset about. However, having dealt with my own issues, I no longer felt the need to cry. The session was about the client not me; I had no feelings of upset or anxiety. In that moment I felt free. I also felt much more empowered and skilled to help my client with his issues in that moment.

"What we recognise in others mirrors the structure that we hold within ourselves" & "we have all the resources that we need within ourselves already"

The fact that I recognised that these three people had these qualities, must on some level show that I too have the ability to do this. Thinking back now I remember when I was younger, I had an art book that I would draw in, to express my feelings and to take time out. I would also quite often just go to my room to tidy and organise, taking my own time. I also remember really enjoying taking baths, just taking some time out. Remembering all these times makes me realise that I do know how to be alone and that I can be alone. Perhaps I have just neglected it for a while. The presuppositions help me to realise that I do have all the resources I need inside me in order to achieve this. Remembering how to do this again feels good.

The result:

It is really interesting from my point of view, as over the last few days I have been really stressed with the business, our house has been untidy and I have just felt exhausted. Writing the above about my art book and how when I was younger I would just go and tidy and take time out, obviously brought to my conscious awareness something I use to do a lot. After writing the above, I went into our kitchen and started sorting out all our kitchen cabinets. I started with one draw, then a second draw, then one cupboard, then a second cupboard, until I had 5 bags of rubbish to clear out and the kitchen looked so much better. As I threw out odd glasses, old tins and just general clutter it was so therapeutic. My cupboards now have a new lease of life. I was completely comfortable in my own space, alone, doing what I was doing. I also felt so good after the cupboards were cleaned – it was my process of de-cluttering. I plan to do the whole flat –which will give me so much thinking and alone time.

I think it is important to recognise different people's maps. It wouldn't necessarily fit my map to sit and ponder about life (only when I was doing my philosophy and theology degree did I do this, it was quite nice putting the world to right in my essays). I think my alone time needs to be active, in the sense that my body is doing something useful and so my mind can wander. In a similar way, like Mike swims and Kate eats plain food and to some extent, Danuga occupies her body with something she sees or hears; we all need distractions. Distracting my body with something that doesn't require great skill means my mind can be free to create, query and develop.

Presenting my model:

When I first noted that I had to present the model to others, I thought 'well I won't be able to do this because it's about being on my own, how can I present such a concept to anyone else. Now, being here, I believe taking the time to present the model to myself is just as important as if I were doing it to others. It says that I am just as important. That I am worth the time taken. I have tried the strategy of just taking a moment for myself and it really works. For me it is a bit like day dreaming, taking myself out of the present and into Hayley's world. It is like I am having a moment with my unconscious.

Being in front of people, but actually being alone:

In some ways my presentation about time line, whilst I was on the course was very self indulgent for me. I was taking up the group's time talking about my issues and learnings. However, for that moment I took the plunge and I did believe I was worth the time. This was massive. Talking about things in public was very difficult as I didn't want to betray anybody or seem to be disloyal. Speaking out loud was a huge leap. And thinking back to that moment now, I was alone up there when I was speaking. I was most definitely in my own space, just like I was when I did time line. I remember Kate saying after the

presentation "Hayley I have never seen you so still". I don't remember ever being that still. I suppose it was inner peace.

A rock solid foundation:

One of the most striking attributes that stood out for me was Sue Knights grounding and centeredness in her own being. I believe in order to have this persona, self reflection is key. If internally there is calm, externally this is transmitted. By undergoing this project I have given myself the time and commitment to engage in self reflection and say that I am good enough to warrant such time. If I don't believe I am good enough others won't either. As I write this, I am on my own. Maybe not physically but for the first time I appreciate how you can be on your own with your thoughts and self. It's a nice place to be. I think this journey has just begun and I am going to enjoy the ride!

My story...On my own....

As I sat on my own for the first time I began to notice, not anything in particular, but everything in particular. I began to walk around, not in any particular direction, just walking around. Up ahead, there were two bridges, both were unstable looking, old and possibly unable to support my weight. I was spending time on my own. Suddenly, I stopped and wasn't able to walk on anymore. The bridge was just a few steps away, I had come this close. My head suddenly filled with questions. What if the bridge collapsed? What if I fell in the water? Who would save me? Who would help me? What would I do? I stood paralysed, unable to walk across.

As I stood, I began to notice the tall palm tree that was in front of me. It's over hanging palms provided me with shelter from the beaming sun on my head. A tree that stood so silently gave so much. As I took a single step, a bird as black as coal flew just in front of me and onto the tree. It squawked right at me. The bird moved from one palm to the next. It was the tree that gave it the freedom to move.

In that instance I suddenly noticed, not the bridges, but the lake that the bridges were crossing and the ripples in the water that indicated the surface. Before I knew it I was stepping onto the bridge. The crunch of the wood underneath my feet alarmed my ears, but I still took another step. I knew if I fell, I would be ok. I knew if I fell I was supposed to fall. As I took another step, I found myself half way across this tiny bridge and then I was on the ground in between the two bridges. The next bridge, suddenly didn't look as old, unstable, and in fact now looked that it was able to support my weight. As I stepped and walked across, it was holding my weight and assisting me across.

As I stood having crossed both bridges, the ground beneath my feet felt safe and inviting. The lake and I were one. The sounds of the birds were all around and I had arrived.