

## NLP NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

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### What is NLP?

This is an interesting question – you cannot pin NLP down to a single definition. There are many definitions of NLP:

- ◆ NLP is the study of subjective experience
- ◆ NLP is an accelerated learning strategy
- ◆ NLP is whatever works
- ◆ NLP is an attitude and a methodology, which leaves behind a trail of techniques
- ◆ NLP is the influence of language on our mind and subsequent behaviour
- ◆ NLP is the systemic study of human communication
- ◆ NLP is the method for modelling excellence so it can be duplicated

A definition from the point of view of working as a psychologist/psychotherapist:  
NLP is an invaluable unifying model of successful therapeutic intervention.

### How did NLP Originate?

NLP began in the mid-1970's in America with the work of John Grinder, a professor of linguistics, and Richard Bandler, a psychologist. They began studying excellent communicators, building models of communication skills. NLP was originally based on the detailed and painstaking observation of outstanding therapists from different fields, an observation which led to the discovery that despite their differences, there were some key patterns of skills, attitudes, and strategies they held in common. From this formed the cornerstone of NLP – namely **Modelling**.

Modelling sought to answer the question: How do people excel in what they do? What exactly do they do that works best and what does not. NLP looked for the answer to the question: 'what is the difference between the exceptional people and the average? By modelling the exceptional therapists such as Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls and Milton Erickson NLP sought to find out how they did what they did so well. How did they think? How did they use their body? What were their goals, values and beliefs about themselves and about others? How did they use language? Out of this NLP built models that work, the premise being if you do as the model does, you will get the same class of results that the model gets, namely, excellent results.

NLP studies three areas that give it its name:

- ◆ **Neurology** – The mind and how we think, how we structure our subjective experience.
- ◆ **Linguistics** – How we use language and how it affects us.
- ◆ **Programming** – How we sequence our actions to achieve our goals.

NLP seeks to answer the basic question – ‘How can I be better?’ Probably the most well known strategy is the **NLP spelling strategy** ([link](#)).

### **What Does NLP Offer?**

- ◆ **Speed:** NLP techniques work quickly
- ◆ **A Pragmatic Approach:** If what you are doing doesn’t work, do something else
- ◆ **An Attitude of Fascination:** every client is unique. How do they do what they do? How can they do it even better?
- ◆ **Simple Techniques:** NLP has a number of simple yet powerful techniques
- ◆ **An Appreciation of how Goals, Beliefs & Values interact**
- ◆ **A Strong Emphasis on Rapport and Trust**

NLP is applied as a way for improving human relationships, with wide-ranging applications in personal therapy, education, coaching and business.

### **NLP and Therapy**

It is more recognised that the therapist is part of the client-therapist relationship and as such has as much influence on the process of therapy as does the client. The assumptions the therapist brings to therapy have a powerful impact on the process of therapy.

The NLP practitioner believes that the assumptions the therapist holds:

- ◆ Defines what is possible in therapy
- ◆ Are communicated verbally and non-verbally; directly and indirectly
- ◆ Relate to what is considered ‘normal’, ‘correct’, ‘functional’

Some prevailing assumptions in therapy include:

- ◆ The client is unwell/dysfunctional/exhibits pathological feelings and behaviours
- ◆ These ‘symptoms’ need labelling and attending to by ‘experts’ because the client cannot figure out what their problem is nor find ways to manage or improve their situation
- ◆ The client’s feelings/behaviours are aberrant as responses to their current or historical situations

- ◆ The client's problem is a static or permanent feature (the client 'has' a condition)
- ◆ The client is broken and needs fixing by the expert.

In studying outstanding therapists, it was evident that they each had significant presuppositions, which coloured their approaches to their clients, their view of their own role and that of the client in creating healing and change. NLP identified and then formulated these presuppositions, which were found to be enabling in the therapeutic work.

The presuppositions which underlie NLP are not considered to be *truth*, rather *useful*, the belief being that by definition, *enabling presuppositions enable*.

Some key NLP assumptions or presuppositions in relation to therapy include:

- ◆ **The map is not the territory**  
We all have different maps of reality. No map is right or wrong, good or bad. If the map works in the context it can be said to be a good map. The question is, 'Does it work', and not, 'Is it true'?
- ◆ **People are doing the best they can given the choices available to them**  
There is no behaviour, however strange, that doesn't make sense at some level to that person. This assumption allows the therapist to respect the client's 'map' and help the client make sense of the meaning and purpose of their behaviour while working with them to open up a wider range of alternatives.
- ◆ **Every behaviour has a positive intention**  
The assumption of a positive intent enables the clients to respect themselves and to move the work forward by attaching a different meaning to the same set of information.
- ◆ **The meaning of every communication is the response it elicits**  
A client's responses will inform the therapist whether they have succeeded in their attempt to communicate with the client.
- ◆ **There is no such thing as failure, only feedback.**  
This frame moves the client away from, 'I'm a failure' to a more neutral frame: 'Why did that not work?' 'What would need to be different to improve the situation?'

### Some benefits of NLP Therapy:

- ◆ **Nothing is taken away** – the aim is adding the development of additional choices.
- ◆ **Clients move away from a ‘victim’ position – to one where they take an active responsibility for themselves and their lives.** Clients learn how to learn about themselves. Their new self-awareness makes them the expert on themselves and enables them to work out for themselves what works and what doesn’t work. Clients move from being reactive to proactive.
- ◆ **Client goals are formulated in a way that makes them more achievable**
- ◆ **NLP therapy works with what the client wants to achieve rather than yet again going over past painful experiences** – where it is necessary to access painful experiences NLP can offer a number of techniques that allow the client to work through issues without reliving the original experiences in full.