Ray Edwards

TOWARDS N-LP WITH A HUMAN FACE:

An appreciation of the first diploma course in neuro-linguistic programming to be run in Europe.*

N-LP: three letters that sound homophonous when said. Three letters that look well on paper: but wait. The soft sell is en-ell-pee and the hard core is neuro-linguistic programming: the P is for programming and not psychology. So why write about it in Self and Society? Because a year ago I was not clear about the meaning conveyed by the P and have had to find clarity by experience. Many of my friends are not clear now and I hope by writing to provide a gift of clarification for them.

Here are some N-LP style questions. What resources did I need for myself when I started the N-LP diploma course? What resources did I have already? Did I know I had them? Did I need to know I had them? Did I stop myself using my resources? The resource I found to be particularly necessary around the N-LP practitioners was to know my heart, to care for my student friends and to care for myself. This care resource was necessary for me because N-LP as a system is as cold as algebra.

At the beginning of the course I didn't know the resource questions or answers. I asked a different question to which the answer was - yes, these are trustworthy, warm hearted people, these trainers and trainee trainers of N-LP. I changed that impression as the months went on and I now suspect that I was being manipulated by covert, carefully framed double messages. These were part of the outcome of activities designed by N-LP trainers in programming students in such a way as to be out of the student's awareness.

The message I had received from friends and publications prior to the course was that N-LP procedures were of value to therapists. These procedures were derived by Bandler and Grinder from a study

of the working procedures of such warm, human, lovable people as Virginia Satir, Milton H. Erickson, Fritz Perls, Dave Dobson and many more outstanding therapists. So I expected that N-LP would be OK! But what specifically do I mean by OK?

Valuable Aspects of N-LP

What do I find valuable about N-LP as taught by Bandler, Grinder and colleagues? (2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13). Firstly, the parts that have been taken from Satir and the others. Some examples: the rapport system comes from Erickson (9) and the so-called meta-language or precision model (16) questions like "How do you stop yourself?" come originally from Perls (18). The N-LP trainers taught the use of these questions very well, using clearly defined exercises. Another example called "future pacing" consists of fantasizing a future time when a changed behaviour is working well. The trainers often spoke of behavioural flexibility and I am very happy with this concept.

Likewise, as Bateson (5) taught, the focussing of attention in experience occurs at differing levels, the logical levels as Bertrand Russell called them. The N-LP trainers had clear exercises for coming to appreciate the importance of these levels; in their terms it was a matter of differentiating the modes of observation, visual (V), auditory (A), kinesthetic (K), olefactory (O) and gustatory (G) and the submodalities of the modes.

Many well developed techniques, adapted from the earlier therapists, have been presented in N-LP in 1, pause, 2, pause, 3 terms – like 6 step reframing. This form is a suitable short-hand for reminding one what to do in the heat of the moment, provided one really knows what to do and has the flexibility to disguise the mechanical structure to help the client.

Then there are the original observations and ideas of Bandler and Grinder. First, the importance of physiological changes, eye movement, facial muscle changes, breathing changes and gestures which do correlate with verbal and mental modes and constructs. These are true and valuable physiological observations which everyone can verify.

I am pleased to have used the course to develop my own sharpness towards the physiological modes of accessing (17), V, A, K, O and G and I have learned effective overlap techniques so that I am approximately equally sensitive in each part of the V, A and K trio. This is particularly valuable as I now have the ability to relate directly to another person by mirroring that persons accessing mode. and thus

improve my establishment of rapport. One of my side benefits is that I now dream in colour instead of black and white and I hear voices in dreams in addition to music.

As non-N-LP therapists we know these phenomena in our clients and respond to them, having learned to do so by out of awareness emulation of our teachers when they were matching and mirroring us or clients. In N-LP we learned to use the physiological phenomena in full awareness using clear and valuable exercises. Thus we learned to smoothly establish rapport and generate a congruence which enables the client to focus attention on desired changes.

Another idea original to N-LP is the concept of anchors. These are verbal or non-verbal communications that elicit a reproducible effect or effects in oneself or other people. The use of touch, visual or sound anchors as taught on the course is powerful and can be very effective in the therapy situation. I emphasize "can be" because the N-LP trainers in their enthusiasm seemed to be unaware that anchors fade out. I agree that new anchors occur sporadically and can foul-up one's processes if one remains unaware. The recognition and utilization ("firing") of anchors is the core of N-LP and essential study for us all. I return to the use of anchors later.

All the parts of N-LP knit together into formal procedures summarised as a) establish rapport, b) gather sensory based information about the present state of the client and then about the desired state or behaviour, c) the client is induced to access suitable resources to deal with the change required, d) a change procedure is used and these have titles like "collapse anchors", "six step reframing" and "new behaviour generator" and e) future pace.

Resources

Erickson (8) drew the attention of his patients to their own resources in a rich and rewarding way. I certainly valued having my attention drawn to my resources and having my resources developed.

But it is only at the end of the course that I have the acuity I needed at the beginning. The resource I needed then was to know when anchors were being set on me so that I could choose to have them or not. I certainly did not know that I had that resource in consciousness although my intuition certainly worked for me out of consciousness. The four or five times I asked "How do I get rid of an anchor I don't want" produced no solution.

On the final afternoon my out-of-awareness processes worked for me and I used my personal resources and excellence anchor (right ear lobe). I did not respond when the trainers fired the preset anchors for joy. All the other students were laughing riotously. I was somewhat puzzled and did not know then, as I know now, that I had escaped from the N-LP trap. I learned that I had the resources I needed to look after myself and I guess the trainers knew that I had escaped. All this analytical verbiage occurred recently.

Undesired Aspects of N-LP

Most of the clients I know have needed time to find out about themselves. They may present with a clear idea of what they want to do and then take time to discover that an underlying feature is perhaps more important. The impression I have gained from the N-LP course is that the client is a waste of time if a **wam, bam, thank you Sam** procedure doesn't work. The N-LP practitioner is encouraged to think in terms of flexibility and changes and immediately sets out to discover a change of behaviour, a new context for an old behaviour or a fusion for contradictory behaviours. And it is the N-LP users' preconceptions that predominate in the high speed change routine.

I have had a lot of practice with computer programming, using keyboard, fortran, basic and CP/M languages and methodology. As the N-LP course proceeded, I recognized a lot of the computing language coming up again in new context. Know your starting state and know your outcome. Use set place procedures, i.e. algorithms or subroutines, to get your outcome. Word-using communications are said to be analogue and continuous whilst non-verbal communications are digital and discontinuous. The computer metaphor is no doubt useful for computer programmers who come to N-LP. But my impression is that the intended metaphor is concerned with people as computers. Am I naive in remarking that people are more complicated than the most sophisticated computer?

N-LP is a system of programming other people in a style of gaining one-up-ness and with no sense of personal responsibility. The ritual procedures like six-step reframing are no doubt effective with "phobic" conditions but only a minority of clients have problems that can be described in this form.

N-LP is a tool, they said, and value free (7). That is for me an absurd hope. My experience indicates that all people have values whether they know it or not and the processes of life express these values among many other things. A hammer is a tool and valuable to the carpenter but misused by a mugger.

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Examine the books on N-LP (3,4,11): people hardly exist except to prove that N-LP is magic or that frogs invariably and instantly turn into princes (what a warm story that was when I first heard it from a TA friend). I have the impression that equally magical would be the turning of a prince into a frog so that he and his mate could be sold the most up-to-date swimming pool to spawn in.

One of the trainers stressed care for people but she was surprisingly abstract in her statements when compared to her specificity in prescribing N-LP activities. The other trainers behaved as if students and business colleagues were expendable and, by implication, clients too. One of the fun exercises provided was to elicit favours from fellow students without saying what they were, like obtaining under-the counter money or sexual favours. Many a true word is spoken in jest.

You may have noticed that I refer to N-LP trainers. This is part of N-LP jargon; the concepts of teaching seem alien to a system of programming. I wonder how they stop themselves teaching?

Perhaps I have over-stressed the interest of N-LP practitioners in making money around the exploitative activities of business men, including their personnel officers. If I was an assertive trade unionist, I would want some kind of training to alert me to the occurrence of N-LP magic and to brief me on ways of countering it.

And if you are into Shamanistic affairs, as I am, you may like to know that the students on this course were sent out into Regent's Park to search for power spots (with a casual reference to Castaneda) with no warning that there are at least as many bad power spots as good. A little amateurish Feldenkrais work was also thrown in as were references to Chomsky and transformational grammar.

N-LP practitioners are limited to the map of the world conception and the corrolary that the only thing wrong with the client is the client's representation of the world. This is, of course part of the truth; the other part is that there is a real world out there and in it are nagging bosses, impotent husbands, unsatisfied wives, needy children and lots more relationships to be concerned about.

N-LP as a metaphor for human existence is of very limited scope. Lankton (15) presents a broad classification of the style of the metaphors of Erickson as being concerned with (but not in Lankton's order) - behaviour, attitude, emotion and self image. N-LP is concerned with the first of these.

The exaggeration in N-LP is astounding. It is very useful to be aware of the visual (V), sound-associated (A) and feelings words (K) in speech (*predicates*, N-LP terminology) and to use them. It is a gross exaggeration to imply that all people use such predicates all the time. To investigate this carefully I audio-recorded a lot of conversations, including sessions with clients and I listened to them over and over again. There may be ten or fifteen minute patches with no V, A or K predicates.

And do eye movements only indicate V, A and K goings on? In my experience people do a lot more with their eyes. They also give valuable indications of other processes by shutting, blinking, defocussing in one or more of many possible ways, and by drawing pictures by tracing outlines. It is one thing to carefully train students into having clear, standardised V, A and K eye movements and it is another thing to have them raw, as it were, in an untrained person.

I find that I need an extra accessing mode system and I call it N for neutral. Conscious processes then start in an N-ground gestalt, and I cross the borders when moving into V, A, K, O or G or combinations of these, as expedient to my purposes.

The undesired aspect common to all my objections is concerned with ethics. The United Kingdom Training Centre for N-LP has no code of ethics and probably doesn't need one if it is to confine itself to the training of business people.

Conscious and Unconscious Processes

There is a particular responsibility on counsellors and therapists who set out to utilize direct contact with unconscious processes. I am well aware of this when I use metaphor with my visitor in trance.

The NL-P trainers talked about clients as going in and out of light trance but these trainers showed no sign of concern for what they might implant in trance. They clumsily by-passed the client's "blocks" and "resistances" which are effectively part of the client's personal safety precautions.

A student was working with me on an issue of trust of other people in a situation where the design of the exercise prevented me from giving her adequate support. As a result she freaked-out and lost trust in me. A week later she is still resisting my attempts to re-establish rapport; ordinary friendship is my desired outcome.

Dave Dobson taught a reliance on unconscious processes entailing
interest in outcomes which are out of awareness. The other NL-P
trainers emphatically taught reliance on known outcomes and an
amateurish, mechanical handling of contact with unconscious processes.
This is supposedly derived from the way that Milton Erickson worked.
Gordon (10), Lankton (15), Rossi (8,9) and Zeig (19) give a fairly homo-
genous impression of Erickson's character and work and it seems
hardly possible that Bandler and Grinder (1) were relating to the same
man.

Quotations

"A child does not try to walk, it walks". The same trainer also said
"If you can't beat 'em, confuse 'em".

I was working with a student friend; his facial muscles were tense
and I suggested – "Go inside and find out what comes up for you.
There is plenty of time". The trainee trainer cut in saying "Get on
with the exercise. You are supposed to be getting sensorily specific
information". The student friend sat up abruptly, facial muscles
very tense and face flushed. "What's going on" he said, breathing
quickly, "I need to go to the loo" (time truncated in this account).

"Look around you" said the trainer. "If you see that someone has
a behaviour that you want, take it for yourself". "Become a behaviour
thief!". He gave no suggestion for a discussion; I might say – "I like
your smile! Is it OK with you if I copy it?"

The potential N-LP practitioner comes back whining: "I tried reframing
with a client and it didn't work". The pat answer is given, "Well try
something else!".

"You're just a machine – do as your programmer says!" So I was told
many times and I did role play a machine once as an experiment.
This experiment led to dramatic distress of another student and I
learned to take care of other students.

"You've all passed, nobody failed" cheerfully chanted the two trainers
on the Thursday of the final week end. On the Sunday five people
were told that they had a provisional pass which would entitle them
to resit the examination; this was said to be a positive reframe of
the state of failure. Champagne and jollity were provided but can
lies be reframed?

Double Messages

I have referred to the use of anchors out of the awareness of the
recipient. If this happens serendipitously, it is just an accident and
one can just wonder what fouled-up what one was doing. But N-LP
practitioners set up anchors deliberately, not caring that the double
message system thus created causes confusion. The following examples
illustrate the procedure.

One of the trainers intervened in an exercise involving three students,
including me. The trainer, for no reason I could detect, talked about
people he had met in another training session who would not get
involved in the on-going processes and as he did so he rubbed his thighs.
I noticed that I and my friends lay back in our chairs, detached from
what he was saying. A few minutes later the trainer had gone and
we were proceeding with the exercise. I rubbed my thighs and one
of my companions lay back and his attention went elsewhere in the
room.

Next day the trainer intervened when I was working with another
student. The trainer rubbed his thighs. I felt a conflict and confusion,
wanting to both continue the exercise and let my attention wander
elsewhere. I think the trainer deliberately fouled-up what I was doing
by giving me a double message. Verbally he was interested and sup-
portive of what I was doing but his body message was "cut-out".
He was able to say truthfully that I had not done the exercise properly.

On another occasion in an exercise I told a joke to a fellow student
about a dog, using the word dog frequently; he laughed vigorously.
Later when I was talking seriously about religious matters he laughed
with a puzzled look on his face when I used the words dog-collar and
dogma. But during talk about poetry he did not respond to doggerel.
I had wilfully confused my friend though without serious outcome,
I hope.

At the beginning of the course the trainers anchored all the students
for happiness and a good learning state. A very praiseworthy procedure
if done with the student's knowledge and agreement. At the end
of the course most students had these anchors fired as part of the
celebrations of success. The failed students had those anchors col-
lapsed against a powerful rejection anchor with the generation of
intense feelings and presumably, if N-LP really works, a future tendency
for rejection and failure.

Early in the course a student expressed doubts about the manipulative aspects of N-LP and had bad states anchored on her by the trainers. On the final weekend these anchors were fired and she became highly distressed. These highly trained N-LP trainers were either behaving with inadequate skill in handling anchors on a student or knew what they were doing, fully aware of their personal abilities and power. I suspect that the latter was true and that this student was deliberately and skilfully set up for failure. The distress of one has become a warning to the others; do not ask awkward questions and raise awkward issues. It is 1984 next year - the manipulators are with us here and now, and not in Moscow or Pekin.

I thus consider it important that anchors are only used with a sense of responsibility. Is it really OK to use anchors out of awareness to get beneficial effects in someone? Whose judgement is it that the outcome will be beneficial? It may also be beneficial to the programmer to get harmful outcomes and the word manipulative is certainly appropriate.

Counselling and Therapy

As a therapist I have become accustomed to safeguarding the integrity of people who work with me and of myself. Like my non-N-LP trainers I refer to non-directiveness and client centredness as prime interests. We speak warmly of people and like to describe something as humanistic even if we are rather vague about what we mean by humanistic.

The system of N-LP has none of this. It is as coldly based on experimental observation as behaviourist psychology except that N-LP has the virtue of being based on observation of people rather than of animals. Only Lankton (14) is concerned with human values and he is no longer an N-LP practitioner.

And if, counsellors and therapists, you go on an N-LP course expecting to learn a new form of therapy, be disabused. N-LP is not therapy: the trainers say so and the books all say so. Yet there are people now out in the world offering therapy solely on the basis of N-LP training.

N-LP is also not psychology, and it is not a system in which personal responsibility is taught - it is programming. Success is measured in terms of responsability (note the central a). The response is to be got from someone else and will receive praise from an N-LP trainer if done out of the awareness of the other person. And I guess this is satisfactory in the business world where aggressiveness rather

than assertiveness is a virtue, where manipulation, exploitation and taking advantage of minor personal weaknesses are the rule of our day.

And what about me, am I not programmed into modes of behaviour alien to myself? Yes, surely I became a neuro-linguistic puppet and I am using this essay as part my de-programming, as my de-briefing and as part of my self therapy.

What shall we do about N-LP?

I want to stress that I find the system of N-LP to be full of astoundingly valuable parts. Only the human heart is missing and this implies for me the necessity of being on guard against N-LP manipulators and the need to take the valuable parts of N-LP and humanize them.

The only defence a person has against manipulation and brain-washing by an N-LP practitioner is to know what the N-LP'er is doing and counter him or her. Blocking with ostracism is a gamey alternative. To be proficient enough to make effective parries, one needs the valuable aspects of N-LP for oneself. These must be given a human face by adding care and a sound ethical basis of working. Including care for the N-LP people.

If I insist that care and honesty come first and that it is necessary to abandon the computer, programming and business metaphors, what is left of N-LP? The physiology remains. First the reproducible observations of the co-correlation of all the V, A, K, O and G states, verbal indicators, eye movements, breathing patterns, and hand and arm gestures. Second, the anchoring systems; anchoring is a grim reality and must be brought under control.

Coda

A useful concept in N-LP is of break-state; something occurs (it may be the N-LP person jumping about) which causes the client (or practising student) to have an abrupt change of state. An occurrence like failing an exam. It is Zen experience that, in losing a fight, one can know that one is the victor. On the N-LP course a friend became victor by winning. With me as loser-victors are the other warm hearted, caring therapists who attended the course.

The warm humanity of Satir, Erickson, Perls and all can be found again and I am sure that the useful parts of N-LP, the beneficial parts, can be put into positive frames to show a human face. Perhaps

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if you have read my words, you can take your glowing heart with
you on the next N-LP diploma course. Be alert to what may be put
on you! You may not get the diploma but you will get much by way
of very valuable technique that you can humanise for yourself and
which will be of value to you and your clients.

If, by chance, you should happen to be one of the unsuccessful students
of this course, I hope that my essay helps you to accept all the valuable
parts of N-LP and to do with them what you will. Just look up to
the right, if you are right handed, and you can know full well what
I am on about, and with your breathing high in your head see the words
"I wonder what stops N-LP practitioners from being fully open, honest
and warmly human".

If you are one of the successful students of this course, I hope that
my essay reframes you into a mode of recognizing your personal
responsibility. You can feel your heart; it goes with looking down
right, f you are right handed, with breathing from your belly area,
with centring your hands gently on your lap and with looking me
straight in the eye.

And I wonder who will come out of full N-LP training with enough
integrity to create the transformed N-LP with a human face?

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