

The Role of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) in Modeling Human Excellence and Mental Skills to Accelerate Learning: Uncovering the exact thought process underlying successful results

Meriem Bouallaga

Assistant Professor, Badji mokhtar - Annaba University 23000. Algeria

Abstract:

This paper aims basically at shedding the light up on the the distinctive role of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) in modeling human excellence and mental skills in order to accelerate the learning process for our learners, and at highliting or uncovering the exact thought process underlying successful results of those who are considered to be super-fast learners. In fact, there is a missing piece in our educational system. We do not teach students how to learn in the classroom. Specifically, we do not teach them what to do inside their mind. The missing piece is that we are not considering the students' mental strategies. We just assume they will learn if we teach in enough different ways. There are lots of great teachers and wonderful teaching methods out there to present the information and there are many ways to evaluate the students to see how much they have learned. But what about the part in between when the student is thinking, processing, and memorizing the information. Some students pick up effective 'mental strategies' for learning and memorizing and others don't. Learning in school is in fact a mental skill that needs to be taught to those students who don't. The thought process a person goes through to get a particular result was a foggy factor, until NLP came along and gave us a precise way to uncover a person's thinking process. Thus our goal is to simulate a precise model of what these persons do and what they think. And then building a complete model to teach it to someone

else, teach the most effective mental or thinking strategies in order to accelerate the learning process.

Key Words: Neuro Linguistic programming, mental skills, modeling human excellence, accelerated learning, thought process.

Introduction:

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a modeling technique and process. It is a set of skills and tools that allows us to model human excellence. The founders of NLP Dr. Richard Bandler and Dr. John Grinder back in the 80's sought out people who were the best in the world at what they did, people who were considered to be 'geniuses' in their particular area of expertise and built models of what these people did in order to teach it to others. The idea was that if you model what a 'genius' does both externally and what they do on the inside of their mind we can accelerate the learning of that skill dramatically. When modeling a 'genius' level student, someone who is considered a super-fast learner, NLP specialists try to simulate the very thought process the genius person goes through when he is learning something and model the exact internal mind behavior to uncover the steps of their thought process as well as the specific details. What they end up with is a precise model of what these persons do and what they think. After building a complete model they can then teach this to someone else, teach the most effective mental or thinking strategies in order to accelerate the learning process.

The missing piece in our educational system

There is a missing piece in our educational system. We do not teach students "how to learn" in the classroom, specifically, we do not teach them what to do "inside" their mind. This missing piece is the reason for why some students struggle in school



(Blackerby, 1996).

The Learning Process

To simplify things let's think of learning as a three step process.

Figure 1 : The Learning Process

Step 1: The information to be learned is presented to the student. The teacher explains or shows the information to be learned, students watch a video, read from a book, or do a hands on task.

Step 2: While listening to the teacher or reading from the book the students are doing something inside their thinking process in order to understand and memorize the information.

Step 3: The school will then evaluate the student with an exam or test or some other way to determine how much of the information the student has understood and remembered. The missing piece is that we are not considering the students' mental strategy. There are lots of great teachers and wonderful teaching methods out there to present the information and there are many ways to evaluate the students to see how much they have learned. But what about the part in between when the student is thinking, processing, memorizing the information, we do not teach the students what to do inside their mind, we just assume they will learn if we teach in enough different ways. Some students pick up effective 'mental strategies' for learning and memorizing and others don't. Learning in school is an unnatural way to learn about the world. Instead of having real experiences we are trying to learn about the world from a book. Learning in school is a mental skill that needs to be taught to some students (Blackerby, 1996).

What is a Mental Strategy?

What do we mean when we say that we need to teach students what to do “inside” their mind? We are talking about the thinking process a person goes through when they are learning something. Let’s take spelling as a simple example. The teacher gives a learning task such as “*Learn this list of 10 spelling words, there is a test next week*”. When the student studies the list of words what do they do in their thinking process specifically? Some students will say the letters to themselves over and over, some students will write them out, some students will visualize the words in their mind, and some students will just look at the list a few times. The key to effective learning, understanding and memory is the specific thought process we go through when we are studying. In NLP speak this is known as a ‘Mental Strategy’ (Tosey, & Mathison, 2008).

Why don’t we teach students how to learn?

Until NLP came along and gave us a precise way to uncover a person’s thinking process, what people did specifically inside their thought process was a mystery. Teachers can’t see inside a students’ mind so how can they know what the person is thinking or what the good students are doing compared to the struggling ones. Until now the thought process a person goes through to get a particular result was an unknown factor. Some schools and school systems have adopted NLP and are now teaching students how to learn but it is still a very small number (Dilts, Bandler, & DeLozier, 1980).

What is NLP?

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a modeling technology. It is a set of skills and tools that allows us to model human excellence. Also known as the study of subjective experience (Bandler, & Grinder, 1975b). The founders of NLP Dr. Richard

Bandler and Dr. John Grinder back in the 70's and 80's sought out people who were the best in the world at what they did, people who were considered to be 'geniuses' in their particular area of expertise and built models of what these people did in order to teach it to others. The idea was that if we model what 'geniuses' do both externally and what they do on the inside of their mind we can accelerate the learning of that skill dramatically. What sets NLP apart is the ability it gives to its user to uncover the unseen part of human excellence. The unseen part being the unconscious thought processes of the person being modeled (Bandler, & Grinder, 1979). NLP is sometimes mistakenly thought of as a type of therapy because of the now famous fast phobia cure and other breakthrough methods that have been developed but it is not, it is a modeling technology that can be applied to almost any field.

What is Modeling Excellence

When modeling a 'genius' level student, someone who is considered a super fast learner, specialists in NLP ask him to do the task that he is good at and the NLP specialist first watch his observable behavior such as how he moves, his eye movement and anything else the NLP specialist can see. He then start asking him what he is doing inside his mind, what he is visualizing, saying to himself, feeling and he uncovers the steps of the super fast learner's thought process as well as the specific details, so if he is visualizing something, what exactly it is, what type of picture. What he ends up with is a precise model of what that learner does and what he thinks. He also elicits from him his attitude, beliefs and motivation. After building a complete model he can then teach this to someone else (Bandler, & Grinder, 1979). It is the ability of NLP to uncover a person's exact thought process that sets it apart from all other methods when it comes to accelerating the learning process or figuring out why

someone is struggling with learning.

Modeling “Genius” learners using NLP

We have all seen students who seem to learn things at a much faster rate than everyone else. We are talking about students who are able to read something once and memorize and understand it easily. Learning math concepts is a breeze and just comes naturally to them. We call them ‘the smart kid’, the ‘quick study’ and sometimes if they are beyond smart we may refer to them as a ‘genius’ (Blackerby, 1999).

These are the types of students that NLP specialists are always interviewing to find out how they do it, because specialists believe it is a matter knowing how and it is not something they are born into (Dilts, & Epstein, 1995). Modeling exceptional people is what NLP is all about. In order to accelerate learning ability the formula works like this: first; find people who are learning geniuses, second; build a model of their behaviors beliefs and thought process, third; teach others to do the same (Dilts, 1998). But who are the models? In fact, NLP specialists have modeled numerous models: A lot of the language learning strategies come from a man called Powell Janulus who is a polyglot listed in the Guinness Book of world records as fluently speaking 42 languages and was a certified court translator in 28 languages, modeled by Robert Dilts & Marilyn Atkinson. Students including award winning math students, students who have attained one time learning, meaning that they read something once and retain and understand the information immediately, and students who are so far ahead to skip 2 or 3 grade levels in school (Dilts, Bandler, & DeLozier, 1980).

How to model a “Genius” learner

In order to replicate what a top student is doing, the NLP specialist models the following three things (Blackerby, 1996):

Beliefs of the model: What the student believes about the subject they are studying,

and their own abilities. If students believe they are ‘not a math type persons’, or that they are ‘not smart’ then even if we teach them wonderful mental strategies the students may block themselves from using them.

Motivation: Why are they doing this? Wanting to do is a big part. Students who are motivated to want to do well have school connected up to what they perceive as important to them personally.

Mental strategies: The exact thought process the student goes through when they are listening to the teacher, or studying from their books.

How to teach the model to another student

We start by teaching students the mental strategies we have taken from the ‘genius’ learners. When students see how easily the strategies work, their beliefs and motivation start to shift. There are lots of NLP techniques that can be used to elicit what beliefs a person holds and how to change limiting beliefs to more useful ones and also what motivates and drives a person and how to utilize that information to motivate them in school (Dilts, 1998).

Memory strategies that work

When students are attempting to memorize and understand some information, how they do that in the fastest and most efficient way possible. What NLP specialists are aiming for is “one time learning”. Learners listen to, read or watch something once, understand it and have it in their memory the first time. This is not always possible but with experience they can come close to it. There are students who have to read or study something 10-15 times before they get the memory and understanding what they want. There is no need for these students to go through such a long study process if they understand how their memory works and then develop an effective mental

strategy for each type of memory task (Dilts, & Epstein,1995).

The thought process is the key

We often hear the following comments from students, parents and teachers:

(Blackerby, 1996)

“I read it 5 times and I still don’t remember it, why?”

“I showed her, told her, she did a hands on experiment in class, we watched a video but 2 weeks later it’s gone from her head and I have to explain it again”

“I write out the definitions 10 times each, I say them 5 times each, why am I not memorizing them”

“My memory is bad”

“He has only a short term memory but doesn’t retain things long term”

The first thing learners need to understand to start getting their memory to work well; is that they actively need to do something in their thought process. When they are reading a book, listening to a teacher, watching a video, what counts is what they are thinking. What they are thinking will decide what gets recorded onto their brain and what doesn’t. The learners’ brain is like the hard drive of a computer, that’s where the information is recorded to. Their thinking process is the software that records the information onto their brain. If they are not doing anything in their thinking, very little is getting recorded.

What top students do and how they record information onto their brain

When NLP specialists first started uncovering the mental strategies of top students it became obvious that most effective learning strategies involve at least three internal senses. When they are recording information onto their brain with their thought process they have five options. They can think in (Blackerby, 1996) :

Pictures (visualize an apple / Visual)

Sounds (imagine the sound of biting into an apple / Auditory)

Feelings or Sensations (imagine the feeling of holding an apple / Kinesthetic)

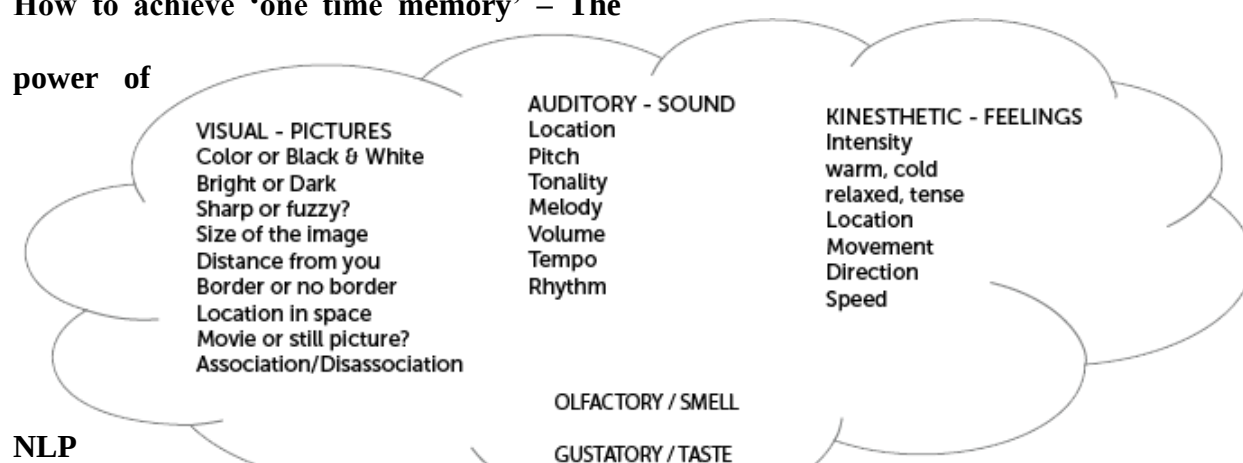
Taste (imagine the taste of the apple / Gustatory)

Smell (imagine the smell of the apple / Olfactory).

In school, learners primarily need to think in pictures, sounds and feelings so we leave the last two out for the sake of simplicity.

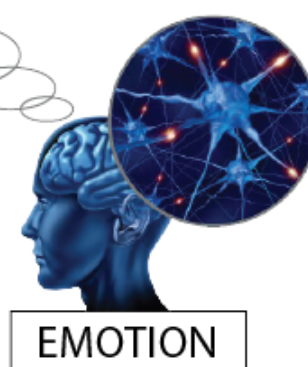
The most effective memory strategies use at least the three internal senses of Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic. (VAK) this gives learners three ways to get the memory back, if they forget the picture they may still remember the sound, if they forget the sound they may still remember the feeling. Just one part of the memory is enough and then the whole memory will come back. Top students typically create mental movies inside their minds including dramatic moving pictures, sounds, feelings, tastes, smells. And they are usually inside the movie “experiencing all the feelings and emotions”. Because this is happening out of their conscious awareness they are sometimes completely unaware of what they are doing, it ‘just happens’ (Blackerby, 1996).

How to achieve ‘one time memory’ – The power of



NLP

The key to achieving one time memory is how they use their thought process,



just knowing that they need to visualize is not enough. Looking at the image below we will see that there are many ways to use our thinking. NLP is the only technology of the mind that talks about the thought process as something more than just visual, auditory or kinesthetic. It is how we use these internal senses that counts (Dilts, & Epstein,1995). The image below shows us just some of the options we have:

Figure 2: Ways of thinking

If they are picturing something in their mind:

Is it a movie or a still picture? Is it fast or slow moving? Are they inside the experience or are they watching from a distance?

If they are saying something to themselves:

What type of voice are they using? Is it loud or soft? Is it fast or slow?

What kind of feeling or sensation are they imagining:

Hot or cold? Rough or smooth? How intense?

The key to one time memory is using our thinking process in such a way as to create “emotion” inside of us. When we get emotion the brain takes this as something important and will record the information strongly on our brain's neurology. Emotionally recorded memories can last a lifetime (Dilts, & Epstein,1995).

What struggling students typically Do

Typically, if students are struggling with memory it's not that their brain is not capable of memorizing well, it is just that the thought process they are using in order to memorize information is either nonexistent or ineffective. Here are some examples of what some students do when they are attempting to memorize information (Dilts, Bandler, & DeLozier, 1980):

- Say it to themselves over and over (very common, also known as rote learning, purely auditory strategy) boring, tedious, emotionless and only works for short term memory, unless we do lots of repetitions.
- Thinking nothing at all or about something else (Students who are bored or have lost confidence may be thinking of something else entirely, they're looking at you but thinking something else) of course little or nothing gets recorded onto their brain.
- Write it out over and over or take lots of notes (This is a kinesthetic / visual external strategy. What we mean is they are feeling themselves writing the information and they are seeing it out the outside (not in their thought process) again this is a limited number of senses being used and not effective). Considering we don't teach students what to do inside their minds they come up with all kinds of methods, some are effective and some not.

How to motivate students using

NLP

How to motivate

students using NLP to want to do well in school. This is something that a lot of parents, teachers and schools struggle with: (Dilts, 1998).

"He's a bright child but he just doesn't seem to care !"

"The more I nag her to do her schoolwork the worse it gets !"

"He has the ability but doesn't put in the effort"

"Could do better if she applied herself"

This is the second reason why students struggle in school. The first reason being we don't teach students how to learn. If we teach a student learning strategies that work and they still don't do well in school, we move on to working on their attitude, beliefs and motivation level towards school.

Modeling motivated students

As we have realized by now NLP is all about ‘Modeling Excellence’. When NLP specialists first started using NLP in education to help students, all they did was teach the learning strategies modeled from top learners. They soon realized that this was not enough. Some students did not use what they had taught them and continued to struggle. They had become so turned off to school and learning, it was blocking their potential (Dilts, 1998).

Modeling top students – What makes them want to succeed?

1) *They have a reason/s that is personally important to them.* Such as: They want to make their parents happy, they like to be the best in the class, they have some future goal in mind that school is linked to, they want to get the reward that the parents may have offered them, they don’t want to suffer the consequences of not doing well whatever they perceive them to be.

2) *They believe that they have the ability to do well.* If students have reasons to motivate them but they have a deep rooted belief that they are dumb, not smart, not a math type person etc. This can block their motivation. They keep saying “If I can’t do it anyway, why try” (Dilts, & Epstein, 1995).

How to motivate students using NLP – Linking criteria

Learning to motivate students using NLP is quite easy if we follow these steps (Dilts, 1998):

1) Find out what is personally important to them. In NLP speak we call this a person’s ‘Highly Valued Criteria’.

2) Connect what we want to motivate them to; towards their criteria. Show them how their criteria will be satisfied.

What are ‘Highly Valued Criteria’

A person's highly valued criteria are a person's perception or beliefs about what is important. Everyone has different criteria so we cannot motivate everyone in the same way. For example, one student might have the following beliefs about what is important in life: (Achievement – Winning - Getting ahead of others - Being the best). Another student's list may be totally different: (Helping others - Being part of a group - Having lots of friends - Contributing to the community) (Dilts, & Epstein, 1995).

How to uncover a person's criteria

The typical strategy when working with students, modeled from Don Blackerby (1999), is:

1) Find out what already motivates the person.

2) Ask questions to uncover their criteria, look for an emotional response.

Example: Loves Video Games / Hates Math

A 16 year old boy was having difficulty motivating himself towards math.

NLP specialist: *"So let's forget math for the time being, what is it that you are motivated to do? What is your favorite thing to do?"*

Student: *"Video games"*

NLP specialist: *"What's important to you about playing video games?"*

Student: *"I just like to play, it's fun"*

NLP specialist: *"You said you play for 3-4 hours some days, you must really like it. I hate video games. What is it that makes you want to do it so much?"*

Student: *"I like playing against others online"*

NLP specialist: *"What do you like about that?"*

Student: *"I like being famous online and I like to win"*

In short, this boy's criteria in this context were:

1- Recognition among his online gaming community (being famous).

2- He loves to win (he had an emotional response here “*I have to win, I want to win*”), when we hit on a strong emotional response we know that we have an important criteria.

3- He likes to play games. (Blackerby, 1999)

How to motivate students using their criteria

There are a number of ways to do this: For younger children we ask the parents to put a system in place at home with rewards and think of ways linked to the child’s criteria.

In the example above we asked this boy to create a game out of math. To think of a way that he could compete against his friends in the class, to make it into a game and “win” at the game. To take the math strategies we have taught him and make it into a game that he can “win” at so his friends will be wondering ‘wow’ what happened to this guy, he’s suddenly a math genius (recognition). This made the math class “way” more interesting for him; he came up with all kinds of ways to compete against his friends such as finishing the quizzes and exams faster than anyone else. Making small bets with his friends as to who would get the highest marks etc. (Blackerby, 1999).

Linking goals to school success

Long term goals are the best kind of reasons a student can have. If a student is passionate about something they are going towards, motivating them is easy. Some students already have goals for the future and they can see how doing well in school / college is going to get them there. Some students have long term goals but don’t see how school is related to them; we need to find a link for them. Lots of students do not have any long term goals at all; we may try to create some goals either short or longer term. Older students we need first to convince them of the importance of having goals, and take them through a goal setting process that matches with their highly valued criteria. We then try to link what they are doing now in school to the goals that

they want. If we can pull this off, the students' motivation takes a huge boost (Blackerby, 1996).

Conclusion:

NLP has endured for more than thirty years. It is a field of practice and innovation with a wide range of tools and techniques that learners and professional educators can apply within both formal and informal educational settings. The distinctive contribution of NLP may lie in its applied methodology, known as modeling. NLP models 'genius' level students to uncover the steps of their thought process as well as the specific details. What it ends up with is a precise model of what these persons do and what they think. After building a complete model we can then teach this to someone else, teach the most effective mental or thinking strategies in order to accelerate the learning process. It is the ability that NLP gives us to uncover a person's exact thought process that sets it apart from all other methods.

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