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## Bringing out the best in all students

What I learned from neuro linguistic programming

**In** early 1991 I attended a course about neuro linguistic programming (NLP.) The creators of NLP, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, referred to it as “an attitude and a methodology that leaves behind a trail of techniques.” They observed people who were excellent in their field, especially those able to facilitate positive changes in people’s behaviour. By studying experts, they were able to work out the “how” and teach others to do the same.

The course was the first time I learned about how important the unconscious mind is in our lives, especially in the classroom – and how to create moments of connection, reflection and suggestion that make things happen to a profound level. By now, if you haven’t turned the page, many of you will be tiring of the lack of “specifics” in this article

so far. A perfect example of poor rapport; the unconscious mind likes specifics, direction and an intention. This is why at the beginning of a lesson, teachers usually give this sense of direction:

“Today we will be continuing the work from yesterday for the first half of the lesson and then we will do a mini test on the topic’s key concepts.”

NLP suggests that if you have a lesson plan on the white board, the unconscious mind will get the student started on some level. Instead of waiting until everyone is present, settled and listening – using valuable moments of class time, the lesson has started.

### The mind’s speed

One of the NLP mind-blowing concepts was the speed of unconscious processing:

Conscious versus unconscious processing:

Eye-10 millions bits/40 per second (conscious processing)

Ear -100,000 bits/30 per second

Skin- 100,000 bits/5 per second

Smell - 100,000 bits/1 per second

Taste - 1,000 bits/1 per second

This is why we have visual cues around rooms that help remind students of preferred behaviour, periodic tables or in early years classes, letters and numbers. The students’ unconscious mind is constantly taking in visual stimuli without the students being aware. ▶

*“ NLP is the modelling of excellence to find patterns of excellence so that these patterns of excellence can be duplicated.”*

*– Gary De Rodriguez*

How often have you assumed that everyone in the class has understood your directions to a task? If you know that every person filters the stimuli that they receive through their brain and their central nervous system, as well as through their past experiences most of which are deep in the unconscious mind, you will wonder why you communicate at all. There has been a lot written about learning styles visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, however, very little in education about the power of language around non-literal language and unintended blockers to success.

What happens when you read, “don’t think of a blue elephant!” This is a great example of how the unconscious mind does not take any notice of non-literal words. Count the number of ‘f’s’ in the next paragraph.

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SULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTI  
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THE EXPERIENCE OF YEARS

Many people struggle to see there are six Fs – because the non-literal words have less meaning to the unconscious mind. So often in class we tell students what we don’t want them to do rather than specifically telling what we want them to do, so we are being less effective communicators. Unconscious processing is why we can read the following sentence:

**Only smart people can read this.**

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly  
uesdnatnrh waht I was rdanieg. The  
phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan  
mnd, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch  
at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn’t  
mttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a  
wrod are, the only iprmoatnt tihng is  
taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the  
rghit pclae.

One of the changes I made in the classroom after my NLP course was to help students upgrade their language. Essentially we can use life-negating language or life-enhancing language. Remember the unconscious is constantly processing language depending on how it hears/sees/senses the words. The way we have been taught to speak or learnt to speak has a huge influence on how we think and program our unconscious mind. The continuous use of negative

non-conscious language prevents us from achieving many of our positive outcomes and goals.

When we use generalizations instead of specifics, we disengage our emotions and the unconscious mind takes little notice and thus positive change is unlikely. Remember our unconscious mind takes notice of specifics that are emotionally charged and it takes language literally.

**Negation Language**

**Life-Enhancing Language**

- Isn’t it a nice day? ..... It is a nice day.
- Wouldn’t you like to go? ..... Would you like to go?
- Don’t you like Maths? ..... Do you like Maths?
- I want, I wish, I need ..... I require, I choose, My choice is...
- I should, ought, have to ..... I choose, I will
- I would ..... I will
- I must, I’ve got to ..... I will
- I might, I am supposed to ..... I will
- I’ll try ..... I will, I am, I can
- I hope ..... My choice is...
- Probably, perhaps ..... I will, I choose
- It’s hard ..... It’s a challenge, It’s an opportunity

Many students who are underachieving will be using life-negating language both outwardly and as inner self talk. In a way it’s a form of invisible self sabotage.

When I explain to a class why I was helping them to upgrade their language, there were many times they upgraded mine.



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## How we communicate

I learned that communication is made up of seven percent of words, 55 percent of physiology and 38 percent tonality. This was another classic mind-challenging moment for me. Given I was sceptical as to how you would prove such a thing, I followed the reasoning. Now that I had an understanding of how the unconscious was working, and how students are influenced by teacher's expectations (Pygmalion Effect 1975) and from my own prior experiences it did make sense. We communicate powerfully by who we are – how we connect non-verbally, intuitively and silently. Professor Rupert Sheldrake writes about morphogenic fields and essentially this follows the same reasoning. Have you noticed that when teachers who win awards speak of their career, they often talk of the love they have for children, their passion for making a positive difference and how much they are committed to their work? Essentially

they will be constantly communicating these messages to their students and this will create a powerful rapport, making students feel safe and valued and so maybe a large percent of their communication will be non-verbal. It is a mutually beneficial relationship and much of it is invisible and unconscious.

The NLP model also encouraged the notion that failure was simply the result of a poor choice: "I did not put enough effort into my assignment, I did not train hard enough for the race or I thought I knew enough to pass – and I made a mistake."

*What do you do if something you chose to do did not get you the results you desired?*

You try something different.

This is being behaviourally flexible. You then explore other options and consider the feedback that you get from your new choice. You will keep trying different ways of achieving the desired results until you

succeed. Many students do not have this flexibility. They fail in their eyes and do not try other ways of achieving the desired outcome.

The only failure is when you give up and do not try to find another way of getting the result you desire.

As a classroom teacher, a counsellor and a parent, I improved on so many levels because of that NLP course. It gave me fresh eyes with which to view others, my communication and my ability to facilitate positive change in our schools, homes and our community. 