

How many years did you study at university to be able to do this?

In a recent Dragon's Den on BBC in the UK, one of the proposals was based upon using NLP as part of an overall solution. Turning down the proposal, one of the Dragons (potential investors) asked the question about qualifications. Andy Coote asks some people inside and outside of the NLP community if NLP needs to embrace a higher standard of qualification to be credible

Introduce the A word – Academia – into the NLP community and the responses are quite polarised, as I found when I asked this question recently. Michael Beale expressed a point of view at one end of the spectrum. “We all coach people anyway and in our day to day interactions with them we cannot fail to have an effect. So NLP can help you to do what you already do, but better and with more impact.”

Christine Miller and Lisa Wake, on the other hand, have both experienced the problems that arise when, as Christine Miller puts it “people get into challenging states whilst training and need intervention from the trainer. When we are working with people’s minds, we need to take great care.” Lisa Wake comments that “I have encountered three individuals who were going through a psychotic process because of interventions by well-meaning NLP practitioners.”

Nicole Bachmann, a coach who has no formal training in NLP, recognises the problem. “Much of NLP at the techniques level is powerful and works well. But some people seem to get a missionary zeal for NLP and try to convert people to it. If they lose sight of the person, it can become manipulation.” Christine Miller is also concerned about the glibness of

claims made for NLP by some practitioners which, she feels, can lead “to a snake oil” reputation” for the wider community”.

Training for NLP is generally organised in a hierarchy of qualifications, but are they clear and are they consistent? What, for example, does NLP Practitioner mean and what can

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one do with that qualification? Michael Beale suggests that “Practitioner is about you. Basically it deals with you as a person and allows you to try out the techniques on yourself. It would be ethically wrong to use techniques on others that you haven’t experienced yourself.” Christine Miller points out that, as a result of the organic growth of the NLP community there are many versions of practitioner training

“from 21 days to some accelerated courses lasting 7 days, some with pre learning at home and some without.”

With several of the contributors, I explored the possibility of differentiating between using NLP for personal change, coaching and therapy. In reality, as Nicole Bachmann points out, NLP is used, but often not named, in a lot of management training, so, maybe personal use is already catered for. Once you use NLP with others, no matter that it is simply an extension of what you do naturally, as Michael Beale suggests, there is a danger that something simple could trigger a bad reaction. At the very least, several contributors agreed, there needs to be training in how to stabilise and refer if the situation gets out of the practitioner’s ability.

Michael Beale sees Practitioner as the starting point of a journey. “People who are good at NLP go to lots of practitioner courses and to master practitioner courses because they know that they will learn something new at each”. The NLP model is that of master and apprentice and an apprentice in one relationship becomes a master in another, thus passing knowledge and expertise directly from person-to-person. “Good people will become assistants and do lots of courses, thus themselves





becoming teachers.”

This model does seem to have served the NLP community well thus far.

In my interview with Christina Hall (this issue) she describes how she became a master trainer of NLP by just this approach.

So what might change things? Competition and external pressure are two possibilities. There seem to be four stages to the regulation of an industry from no regulation through to individual initiatives by companies and groups (which give competitive advantages) to cross-industry self-regulation and then to external regulation. Related disciplines are already well down this route. Lisa Wake points to the work that UKCP and BACP are doing to create an industry accreditation scheme for counselling and psychotherapy. During her time as chair and deputy chair of UKCP, she was involved in developing a White Paper setting out the approach. “The UKCP and BACP are working to bring coaching into the counselling and psychotherapy regulation system. I can see that NLP, especially where it is used for clinical support, could also take its place here.”

Lisa Wake is also working, for her own training company, with a UK university to develop an MSc where NLP Practitioner and NLP Master Practitioner modules are worth 30 credits at level 4. The MSc also requires some research with a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, a dissertation and 450 clinical hours of practice. There are also courses being developed at NVQ level 3 and 4 for Life Coaching, NLP and Hypnotherapy. Nicole

Bachman adds that “The National Coaching Federation and CoachU have been proactive in developing qualifications that are based on

practice including the documentation of 2000 hours of coaching. If the market demands qualifications, more will follow.”

Why might the market demand such approaches? Nicole Bachmann suggests that larger companies may lead the trend as they have done in other areas of standardisation. “Two to three years ago, coaching was a booming market but the market is consolidating and buyers are becoming more discerning. Companies will want ways of making better buying decisions and the industry faces a dilemma. If Individual organisations and groups continue to create their own qualifications there will probably be confusion in the minds of the consumers as to the value of the qualifications that are presented.” Self-regulation is a way of ensuring that the industry speaks to governments and to the buyers with a single and clear voice.

There is one other powerful force at work in an increasingly litigious society, insurance. Darren Jarmin is an Insurance Broker who works with a number of professional bodies to offer professional liability cover. He sees advantages to practitioners to be accredited by their professional bodies. “At present, because there is no regulation in this industry, it is always difficult for us to accurately assess what training is ‘good’ and what is not. This is why we predominantly provide discounted schemes for associations such as ANLP, BACP, UKCP etc, as these organisations know far more about their particular field than we would, and as a result they will set guidelines, codes of conduct, ethical standards etc that all members have to adhere to - This in turn means that the insurers are happier to take on the risk knowing that set standards are in place. In return for providing the insurers with a lower risk, they will offer

the policy at a reduced rate, so I guess you could say that it is encouraged as it reduces the exposure to the insurer.”

Is it possible to find common ground between the parties to this debate? Michael Beale sees problems in making NLP a pure academic subject because “NLP is about exploration not about academia.” Christine Miller is also keen to ensure that qualifications are based on practice as well as research and learning “I don’t necessarily believe that research has to be ‘scientific’ as there are effective ways of using qualitative research. We can have valid and reliable results without huge samples and without ‘double blind’ testing. In counselling, masters and doctorates are based on reflective practice. That is looking at our own practice and our own self and how far the espoused theory matches with what you actually do.” The MSc that Lisa Wake is developing certainly stresses practice as much as research. ANLP is also taking on board the principle of reflective practice with their new online CPD programme. “It is a reflective outcomes based record and it will be available to all members by the beginning of June” comments Karen Moxom, “it may just provide one solution to this debate.” It seems that there really could be a ‘third way’ for NLP. ●

We’d like to hear from our readers on this topic. Is it important to the future of NLP or are there alternative ways to move forward? Have you encountered negative attitudes towards your NLP qualifications? **Contribute to the debate at <http://www.anlp.org/forum/default.asp>**

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