

NLP in Action

by Dr. Richard Bolstad with Annette Currie

Stasis And Action

To understand what this article is about, I invite you to begin by performing a simple experiment. In a moment, I invite you to step back into a memory of a time when you experienced a standard NLP process, done with yourself as the “client.” Sit or stand in the position you were in at that time, as the NLP process was done. Make again any movements of your body that you made as that change process occurred. Notice what this feels like kinaesthetically. Actually do that and then return to the page.

Now step back into the real-life situation that you were changing by using that NLP process. Stand or sit as you are in that real life situation, and perform any movements that you perform in that situation. Notice what this feels like kinaesthetically. Do that and return to this page.

As a generalisation, most (but not all) NLP processes are far more static than real life. While such processes enable us to delve into the inner world where we create our own reality, they do not necessarily match that reality in this one key respect. That is curious because NLP techniques were initially modelled from

some very active people. In this article I want to suggest that we revisit those more active roots of our methodology.

Action In The History Of NLP

In his book modelling Virginia Satir, NLP trainer Steve Andreas discusses the fact that Satir did not merely talk with her clients. She engaged them in action. He identifies two key aims of this action. Firstly it helped associate clients into experiences:

Another powerful element of Virginia's effectiveness was her insistence on action. She understood that people change only if they fully experience the events or perceptions that words can only point to." Secondly, it helped futurepace new strategies. "After helping one or more family members make changes, she would ask them to re-engage in live interaction, so that she could evaluate and test what she had done. . . . Virginia used action to translate hopes and yearnings into behaviours that satisfied them. . .

(Andreas, 1991, pp. 12-14)

“Family sculpture,” Andreas notes “was one of Virginia’s well-known ways of transforming words into action. . . . She would position family members in a still tableau or sculpture that displayed their typical ways of interacting—their supporting, clinging, blaming, placating, including, excluding, their distance and closeness, power and contact relationships, etc.” (Andreas, 1991, p.15). This method is taken further in the work of Bert Hellinger, modelled by NLP trainer Lucas Derks. Derks’s own work explores how people create an internal “social panorama” mentally positioning people they know around them and using location as a key submodality to represent psychological significance. He says “Hellinger developed a dramatic way of making panoramas visible. It is a far better show than most NLP demonstrations, where sometimes 50 people sit around and watch how someone has closed his eyes and ‘thinks’ . . . The client is asked to choose people that may have some resemblance to the original family member. . . Hellinger explains to a client: ‘Now you take the chosen persons one by one with both hands, and put them on their spot in relation to the others, just like you experience them right now.’” (Derks, 1998, pp.139-140).

Both Satir and Hellinger would recognise the inspiration for their work in the psychodrama model (discussed below). John Grinder and Richard Bandler recommend in one of their earliest books (Grinder and Bandler, 1976, p.67) the use of “psychodramatic sorting” for internal parts conflicts. They say “Here the therapist has the client select two members of the group to play his polarities... The therapist will direct the client to play first one and then the other of the polarities.” In this way, the polarities are initially enacted by the client themselves and can then be modelled and played back by the selected group members.

The use of action has re-emerged through the history of NLP in numerous places. Robert Dilts uses “spatial anchors” (marking out set spaces in the room as anchors for particular states) and explains why he uses action to do both Re-imprinting on the time line and sort the different sensory components of a belief: “I like making a physical time line because it helps to organise the elements of the system in the same way as putting the senses into their accessing cues helps organise them and keep them separate.” (Dilts, 1990, p.116) Michael Hall’s Mind-To-Muscle pattern involves using active expression so that a highly valued principle delivers real learnings and “the learnings become incorporated into the very fabric of the muscles themselves.” (Hall, 2001, p.42)

While action has a history in NLP, there is no agreement about the significance of action and only limited attempts to create a model for the use of action within an NLP framework. In the field of psychotherapy, there are at least three distinct models in use,

as discussed by David Kipper (Kipper, 1986, pp. 10-22). These are psychodrama, fixed role theory and behaviour rehearsal.

Psychodrama

Firstly, there is the psychodrama model of Jacob Moreno (1892–1974). In the early twentieth century, Moreno evolved a model of psychotherapy which took its metaphor from the theatre. Noting that children developed new behaviours after role-playing them in “games,” he assisted first troubled children and then adults to explore in role-play their internal and interpersonal dilemmas. Moreno described Psychodrama as “a therapeutic controlled acting out taking place within the treatment setting.” (Moreno, 1977, p.X) He believed that this process of exploring experiences in action would increase clients’ “spontaneity.” This word has a specific meaning in Psychodrama. An action, in Moreno’s terms, is spontaneous if it enables the person to “...respond with some degree of adequacy to a new situation or with some degree of novelty to an old situation.” (Moreno, 1977, p.XII)

To create an adequate response to a situation requires developing a role for that situation. By “role,” Moreno refers to “the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he reacts to the specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved.” (Moreno, 1977, p. IV) Moreno points out that the role evolves directly from the individual’s interaction with the world, even before the person has a unifying sense of “self.” “Role playing is prior to the emergence of the self. Roles do not

emerge from the self, but the self may emerge from roles.” (Moreno, 1977, p. 153) In some ways, the concept of role and role relationships corresponds to the concept of strategy in NLP. In other ways, a role is similar to a “part” in NLP terminology. One key difference is that roles are, by Moreno’s above definition, interactional. Psychodrama presents a systemic model of therapy in which a person’s strategies or parts cannot be understood in isolation, but are related to other persons or objects. As a result, psychodrama is generally done in a group setting, where the roles of others can be played by other group members (who thus become auxiliary actors).

The term role is taken, of course, from the theatre. While Moreno emphasised that he used the term in a different way to the way it was used in drama, the metaphor of the theatre is also used to describe the process of therapy in psychodrama and Moreno’s related “action methods.”

There are three basic phases in a psychodrama enactment, called by Adam Blatner (Blatner, 1988, pp.42-101):

- Warm-up (The director or therapist warms up to their own role, then the group warms up to each other and to the task, then a protagonist/client is selected and warms up to their role and contract with the director)
- Action (the problem is presented, auxiliary actors are engaged, resistances are dealt with, action explores the protagonist’s issues, often leading to catharsis, and finally, surplus reality enables the exploration of

- other possibilities in the drama)
- Sharing/Integration (the protagonist explores how they want to act in real life, they and the group share their responses to the psychodrama, and the session is closed by dealing with “re-entry” to real life, checking what support is needed and what unfinished business is left, and saying good-bye)

Change in psychodrama is considered to occur through the development of spontaneity and role expansion. By role expansion, the development of more adequate new roles is described. Both these goals of psychodrama imply action, rather than just visualisation.

Fixed Role Therapy

While Fixed Role therapy has never “caught on” in the way that psychodrama did, it provided the first non-psychodramatic model for understanding the use of action and role enactment in therapy. In developing Fixed Role Therapy, George A. Kelly (1905-1967) was influenced both by Alfred Korzybski and by Jacob Moreno. Kelly had observed that the real life behaviour of actors in the theatre was often changed by their playing a role in a particular production.

In fixed role therapy, the therapist begins by analysing the current behaviour of the client, and the “constructs” which determine this behaviour. Constructs are what we in NLP would call “frames” or “beliefs” which shape expectations. Kelly says “A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which

he anticipates events.” (Kelly, 1955, p. 46) The Fixed Role therapist writes for the client a “script” which requires her/him to assume an alternative identity and act in ways which are both more useful and sharply in contrast to the previous “script” which the person has lived by.

Once this new script has been written, the client visits the therapist every second day for a period of two weeks. During this time, he or she assumes the new identity designed by the therapist and acts according to it, even taking on the name assigned with it. The therapeutic sessions explore the effects of this new role on the areas of work, relationships with people of the same sex and the opposite sex,

relationships with parents and general life orientation. Unlike a psychodrama, the action in fixed role therapy takes place in the real day-to-day life of the client. This is a rather extreme form of “tasking” as applied by Milton Erickson.

Behaviour Rehearsal

While Moreno and Kelly thought of action and role-play as central to their methodology, the developers of Behaviour Rehearsal considered it as merely one of the many techniques for behaviour change. Joseph Wolpe (1915–1997) was a pioneer of many behavioural change techniques, including behaviour rehearsal, originally called behaviouristic psychodrama (Wolpe, 1969).

NLP connection

Wolpe gives an example of its use with a client who has an anxiety response to another person. He says (Wolpe, 1969, p. 68):

The therapist takes the role of a person towards whom the patient has a neurotic anxiety reaction and instructs him to express his ordinarily inhibited feelings towards that person. Particular attention is given to the emotion infused into the words. The voice must be firm, and suitably modulated. The patient is made to repeat each statement again and again, being constantly corrected until the utterance is in every way satisfactory. The aim of the rehearsal is, of course, to make it possible for him to express himself with his real "adversary" so that the anxiety the latter evokes may be reciprocally inhibited, and the motor assertive habit established.

Later texts described the use of group settings to create an entire "community" in which the client could interact in this way. Behavioural therapists were also eager to develop a role theory which did not draw on Moreno's model. They used Sarbin and Allen's (1968) model of roles as socially defined behaviours associated with given positions (e.g., husband, daughter). This classification (social roles) is only one of three types of role identified by Moreno (the others being psychosomatic roles (e.g., eater, walker) and psychodramatic roles (the roles that emerge in a culture from collective experience, such as the hero or the dragon).

Why Use Action?

Most NLP, as Lucas Derks notes above, is done with the client sitting down, closing their eyes, almost immobile. Such methods have advantages. For example, static NLP methods are often faster, because the client does not need to explain their inner world or move things and people around to begin a change process. Static methods are also often more private, reducing the need for others to know the content of the person's experience. When we achieve such success with these static techniques, what reasons are there to justify us changing to the use of more active methods *in some situations*? There are four that stand out for me, and two of them are the rationales that Steve Andreas gives for Satir's work.

Firstly, action gives us an expanded range of choices for helping people access the experiences they want to. Consider the situation where I have someone run the NLP trauma cure. I ask them to see an image of themselves sitting down in front of them, watching an image on a movie screen further away. This complex "double dissociation" scenario can, of course, be explained verbally and done with visual imagination. However, when someone is already anxious about their problem, it helps to take that visualisation task away from their conscious mind and simply set out the scene using two chairs and a blank wall. The feeling of being dissociated is often easier to access with these external visual and kinaesthetic cues.



Secondly, most of our change techniques are designed so that the client will be able to behave differently in an active situation at some future time. It seems clear to me that the very best way of testing and futurepacing this change is to use a situation which as closely as possible matches the ones the client wants to be different. Hence, when Richard Bandler is testing his work with a person who had anticipatory anxiety about people failing to turn up on time, he says to her "You can go try it in the real world. I'll tell you what. Why don't you go outside by the coffee machine and I'll meet you there in ten minutes." (Bandler, 1984, p. 26). When he has worked with a client who had an agoraphobic fear of driving outside the city limits, he says, "I've got a couple of other things I want to do, and then we'll go for a ride in the country." (Bandler, 1984, p. 57). Such real-life tests are clearly more effective than the imaginary ones which preceded them in each case. Using action enables us to create more powerful testing and more convincing futurepacing.

Thirdly, active methods may extend our success with NLP to new personality types. In my NLP Master Practitioner trainings in New Zealand, the Kiersey Bates questionnaire reveals that 80–90% of our NLP participants are introverts. They recharge their batteries by themselves, and consequently find interactive situations more tiring than refreshing. My impression at Psychodrama gatherings is that the opposite is true. Most of the people there are extraverts; they enjoy the expression of their experiences in action in front of others. It seems likely to me that there

are other personality distinctions that mark out more “immobile” forms of NLP from active change techniques such as psychodrama. For example, NLP may focus more on visual and auditory digital sensory input than on kinaesthetic and auditory tonal experience.

Fourthly, action, to use a psychodramatic expression, can warm the client up to psychosomatic roles faster than talk. The body delivers information and memories, stored deeper in the brain, long before the conscious mind has access to them. This is understood in Ericksonian therapy and is the basis for the use of ideomotor signals. Ernest Rossi and David Cheek (1988, pp. 20–21 and 26) explain “Careful observation of many old-fashioned efforts

at total age regression indicated that the significant memories could be accessed rapidly within a moment or two at this initial emotional and physiological level. We speculated that this affective response accessed the limbic–hypothalamic and reticular activating systems. It took longer for such memories to be expressed by action potentials moving skeletal muscles at the ideodynamic finger signalling level. Finally, at the highest integrative, cortical level, the memory could be expressed within cognitive frames of reference as a verbal communication... Talking depends on associative pathways within the cortex of the brain. This ability to report verbally on visual, auditory, olfactory, tactual and positional stimuli depends on the highest levels of cortical activity.”

Towards An NLP Metaphor For Action

Neuro Linguistic Programming, by its name, originally uses a metaphor from the world of computers. A person’s responses are described as emerging from strategies and submodalities which are analogous to computer programs. The static nature of computer hardware makes it hard to add action to this metaphor, and the self-contained functioning of a computer limits the metaphor in understanding interaction between people. Indeed, the person in NLP based changework often behaves more like a computer, passively taking in a new program, rather than like an actor in the drama of their life.

metamorphus press

Psychodrama, Fixed Role theory and Behaviour Rehearsal have all to some extent made use of the metaphor of the theatre to explain what is happening when we use action therapeutically. This metaphor has the advantage (for therapeutic work) of allowing the description of interactional “scenes,” of “action,” and of multiple actors (such as the three versions of the client required in the NLP trauma process referred to above; the observer, the person in the movie theatre seat, and the person on the screen). In Psychodrama, a role is said to have five components: context, behaviour, belief, feeling, and consequences (Williams, 1989, p. 58). These equate to some extent with the NLP TOTE model for strategies (Bolstad, 2002, pp. 31–34) so that Context (especially in

the sense of the theatrical “cue”) = the Trigger, Behaviour = the Operation, Belief (on which basis decisions are made) = the Test, and Feeling and Consequences (being both results of the situation) = the Exit. Strategies, in this sense, provide a bridge between the two metaphors of computer and stage.

In the brain, we know that different “actors” (we would sometimes call them “parts” in NLP) are most likely embodied in separate neural networks (see Bolstad, 2002, p. 38). One of the risks of the “role” metaphor, I believe, is that it does not so easily suggest the integration of separate neural networks (separate roles) into one network, something that clearly happens in NLP processes such as parts integration. This

integration is seen as central by many psychodramatists however. For example, Paul Holmes, Marcia Karp, and Michael Watson (1994) say of role reversal (a technique described later on in this article) that it is “... a technique typical to psychodrama, and is one which is considered by many practitioners as the single most effective instrument in therapeutic role-play. According to JL and ZT Moreno (Moreno et alia, 1955) such a procedure is important not only for interpersonal socialisation with others but also for personal *self integration*.” (emphasis mine). In NLP, “parts work” is always based on an attempt to at least harmonise and more usually integrate the “parts” involved (see Bolstad, 2002, pp. 72-76).

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Virtual reality provides us with a metaphorical situation which I believe is more isomorphic with NLP than the theatre.

In virtual reality, a computer projects the illusion of a real world, in which you as the experiencer are immersed. The sensory qualities of this virtual world (such as the loudness of sounds, or the colour of objects) can be altered from within the computer. Although the experience you are having has some correlation to a “real” world around you, its experienced significance is a function of your computer’s embellishments. Nonetheless, when you move around and interact in this embellished virtual world, “things happen.”

Michael Hall uses a similar analogy when he describes “personality” as an “energised holographic force field” (Hall, Bodenhamer, Bolstad and Hamblett, 2001, pp. 67–90). He says that we “embody” our internal world, projecting it outward into space like a hologram. An example is our sense of time as having direction in relation to our body (creating what Hall calls “time lining”). A person talking about the future may gesture towards the front as if that future existed there. Indeed, in their virtual world, it does. Similarly, we project other metaprograms into space. A person who likes to get the “big picture” on life, Hall notes, may step back so they can see the whole thing. People code their beliefs, their

values and even their sense of who they are with the submodalities of location.

In psychodrama, experiences which have not occurred in “real life” but can be created and enacted are often referred to as “surplus reality.” Moreno says “There are certain invisible dimensions in the reality of living, not fully experienced or expressed... and for those who failed to experience them, life is incomplete... that is why we have to use surplus operations and surplus instruments to bring them out in our therapeutic settings.” (Moreno, 1966, p. 151) In fact, we know from recent research that *all* experience is actually surplus reality!

Advanced Neuro
Training

Even our sense of our own body is a virtual illusion, as demonstrated by the phantom limb phenomenon, where someone with an amputated limb reports that they still feel it to be there. A fascinating experiment further emphasises this virtual nature of all experience. V. Ramachandran and William Hurstein explain (1999) "The subject sits in a chair blindfolded, with an accomplice sitting at his right side, or in front of him, facing the same direction. The experimenter then stands near the subject, and with his left hand takes hold of the subject's left index finger and uses it to repeatedly and randomly tap and stroke the nose of the accomplice, while at the same time, using his right hand, he taps and strokes the subject's nose in precisely the same manner; and in perfect synchrony. After a few seconds of this procedure,

the subject develops the uncanny illusion that his nose has either been dislocated, or has been stretched out several feet forwards or off to the side, demonstrating the striking plasticity or malleability of our body image. The more random and unpredictable the tapping sequence, the more striking the illusion." Ramachandran and Hurstein were able to create this illusion in 12 out of 18 subjects (research referred to me by Steve Andreas). This study emphasises that our body-image is just that: an image or a construct which we manufacture internally and project out into space around us.

Lucas Derks, as mentioned above, has used the term "social panorama" to refer to the projected social world in which we live our lives, peopled by virtual humans,

by nature, by dead and spiritual beings and by our own self-image. Emphasising the virtual nature of all experience, Derks begins his book with the statement "Even when you make love, it is your own visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory image of the other person you embrace." (Derks, 1998, p. 5) Once we understand that we live in this virtual world, we understand that to move around in our dreams, as "action methods" of therapy suggest, is to move around in our own virtual space. To sit immobile while doing NLP is almost tantamount to denying the world our brain has constructed. If we want to change our inner world, it makes sense to interact with it on its own terms, and those terms involve locational changes and movement.

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NLP Applications

Many applications of action are already discussed and demonstrated in transcripts in the NLP literature, particularly in the work of Robert Dilts. For example:

- Setting out a Time Line on the floor and walking along it to set temporal locations to revisit disturbing emotional experiences or resourceful times. (e.g. Dilts, 1990, pp. 84-114; Andreas and Andreas, 1994, pp. 129-140)
- Integrating conflicting parts standing at a metaposition on the other corner of an equilateral triangle opposite the two parts (e.g., Dilts, 1990, pp. 156-173)
- Learning from standing in first

(self), second (other) and third (observer) positions, about a relationship which has been a challenge (e.g., Dilts, 1990, pp. 190-199)

- Aligning neurological levels by stepping through them on the floor (e.g., Dilts and McDonald, 1997, pp. 24-36)
- Setting out a physical space as a movie theatre with a projection booth to run the movie in, for the NLP dissociation trauma cure (e.g., Bolstad and Hamblett, 1997, pp. 118-120)
- Using models such as the Circle of Excellence which anchor resourceful states to set places on the floor and utilise stepping into those resources in order to access them (e.g., Andreas

and Faulkner, 1994, pp. 44-47)

- Having a client “leave their resistances and conscious mind in one chair” while they walk over to another chair and sit down and go into trance (e.g., Erickson and Rossi, 1981, p. 9)
- Rehearsing clients through new strategies in action and installing them for future use (e.g. Bandler, Grinder and Satir, 1976, pp. 85-86).

The range of these applications leaves no doubt that, should we choose to, we can usefully incorporate action into all forms of NLP intervention, from submodality work to anchoring, from parts integration to strategy change, from trancework to interpersonal communication.

Neuro-Energetics

Structuring A Session With Action

Preframing: As with all NLP techniques, some preframing is necessary to successfully pace and lead the client into action. Inadequate framing and pacing will lead to inadequate action. This stage involves projecting the virtual world into existence and associating the client into it.

For example, before his time line re-imprinting work with Carla, Robert Dilts (1990, pp. 84-85) says,

Carla, I would like you to imagine that in front of you, here on the floor, there is a line. This line is your line of time. To the left is the past, to the right

is the future, that is, where you would like to be able to go, and to the left is what has happened. Here you are in the present and you have this thing, something that is sucking part of your identity out. I am going to ask you in a moment to step on this imaginary line, facing your future. . . . Then I want you to start walking backwards along this line, back in time. . . . And when you step on that line, I want you to be fully inside your life experiences.

Action: Most NLP techniques involve some form of accessing personal resources, and then some way of applying those resources to a challenging situation. That means that there

Leading Edge

are at least two virtual locations to be used, and at least two “programs” to be run through.

Postframing, Ecology checks, and Futurepacing: Having the person turn off their virtual environment after action is as important as turning it on before. We do not want the person to continue to think of the left hand back of the room as “the past” or of a particular spot on the floor that everyone walks across as “my resources.” We do not want them to confuse another training participant with “my father” or “the part of me that wants to smoke cigarettes” simply because that participant occupied that location in the projected virtual experience. Furthermore, it is important to have the person confirm that they have changed, and check the ecology of what they have done. This is all very similar to the process of re-orienting a person after a hypnotherapeutic session (and not surprisingly because action in virtual reality presupposes an altered or trance state). This can be done very simply.

For example, after parental time line re-imprinting with Dave, Connirae Andreas (1994, p. 140) says,

Great. So that is the process (very softly spoken) and if you would like to let your unconscious do any more absorbing, or generalising, or letting that light flow and deepen in any other ways, that is fine. The integration can continue in whatever ways are appropriate and right and fitting, and natural and automatic, even after we finish, because

this kind of shift and integration often does continue and it is a nice thing to acknowledge that happening. So whenever you are ready you can just let yourself consciously return to us in this room, as the integration continues unconsciously. Thank you. (Dave hugs Connirae)."

Modelling More Techniques

Dale Buchanan is director of the Psychodrama Section at Saint Elizabeth Hospital, Washington, and author of numerous articles in the *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry*. He has written an article with Donna Little studying the similarities between NLP and Psychodrama. They note "Bandler and Grinder have refined the therapeutic process. Needless to say they have miraculously packaged a process of immense value to all therapists." (1983, 36, p. 114).

I believe we could also say that Psychodrama has packaged a process of immense value to NLP Practitioners. Once we recognise the action implicit in the virtual reality model of NLP work, we can realise that the fields of Psychodrama, Fixed role theory, and Behaviour rehearsal will contain a rich source of new NLP techniques.

For example, the simple psychodramatic process of reversing roles gives us a very effective way to install a genuine second position for NLP clients. Here is the detailed initial explanation of reversing roles given to a client (called the protagonist in psychodrama) who has been

acting in a projected virtual reality dialogue with another person (called an auxiliary in psychodrama) as the stand-in for their boss: "Reverse roles! I want you (the protagonist) to sit (stand) here, where the auxiliary was and be the person portrayed by the auxiliary. Behave and talk exactly like him (her). And you (the auxiliary) move here where the protagonist was and try and be him (her) exactly. Now (to the auxiliary who plays the protagonist) will you, please, repeat the last sentence that the protagonist has just said?" (Kipper, 1986, p. 163)

Linguistic Cues For Action

We also have, with NLP's model of sensory representational systems,

a key to the development of our own action methodology. A client's active kinaesthetic verbs, and their linguistic markers for submodalities of location give us directions to the projection of their virtual reality.

Most of us know that when a client says "I'm trying to get away from that horrific memory." They are telling us verbally about the need for a fuller dissociation such as the NLP trauma cure provides. Similarly, when a client tells us "I'm trying to reach a state of happiness, but it seems too big a leap forward from where I am." we get direct descriptions of the virtual world that they are living in. We can have them project that world into the room, and this immediately gives us and them more clues about what needs to change and how to change it.

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Examples of kinaesthetic verbs are: Balance, Block, Bounce, Break, Cast, Catch, Chew, Crush, Drive, Grab, Grind, Grope, Hang, Hike, Hit, Hold, Kick, Leap, Let-loose, Move, Penetrate, Press, Pull, Reach, Roll, Run, Scrape, Scratch, Shape, Slip, Stick, Stir, Stretch, Stick, Support, Swallow, Sway, Tap, Throw, Tie, Touch, Turn, Vibrate, Walk

Examples of markers for location are: Above, Away, Back, Behind, Below, Beyond, Bottom, Close, Distant, Far, Forward, From, Front, In, Inside, Left, On, Outside, Reachable, Right, Top, Towards, Under, Unreachable, Within

Summary

Most NLP change processes have been developed as static, internal

experiences. While there are advantages to this, we can also benefit from the power of action to assist accessing states, to futurepace and reality-test changes, and to match more active and extraverted clients. In psychotherapy in general, there are at least three models for the use of action: Psychodrama, Fixed Role theory, and Behaviour Rehearsal. Psychodrama, with its basis in role theory, influenced NLP development particularly through the work of Virginia Satir.

Our inner world is like a virtual reality, and action methods enable us to externalise or project this virtual reality into the room where we are working. Many NLP techniques, particularly those developed by Robert Dilts, already do this; for example

setting out time lines on the floor, creating spatial anchors, moving through first second and third positions as set out on the floor, and rehearsing new strategies. In each case, the virtual reality projection needs to be preframed before starting, and the person drawn back to external reality afterwards. Psychodrama offers many other active techniques which could be modelled and used in developing NLP processes. Also, each time a client uses kinaesthetic verbs of movement, or linguistic indicators of location, they provide us with cues to create action from.

This article is not intended to be an instruction manual for the use of action in NLP. It is intended to draw attention to this element of what we do and to encourage the further exploration of an important tool which has yet to be given its full recognition in NLP.

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