

## **An Interview with Gaye O' Brien: NLP ( Neuro Linguistic Programming ) Essentials for Teachers**

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### **1) Gaye, I have just read your book on NLP Essentials for Teachers-how did this come about?**

The book came about after I trained as an NLP Trainer in 2008 and began to realize how NLP had helped me to develop greater self-awareness, conserve and project my energy in a more targeted way, communicate more effectively with others, and shift my mindset to one of empowerment. I read widely on the subject and interviewed teachers and NLP trainers.

I felt many teachers didn't know about how beneficial NLP could be to them in the classroom and I felt compelled to share this information and these techniques with them. They have been amazed with this information and the fact that it is not available in teacher training institutions and in teacher professional development programs.

It took me about two years to reach publication.

### **2) Let's communicate for a few minutes about how GOOD, EXACT, SPECIFIC, PRECISE communication can help both pupils and teachers.**

If teachers can become great at communicating effectively with their students, they will save time and energy getting their message across as they know and cater for the learning needs of their students and achieve success with them. Students, on the other hand, will feel like they know what their teacher is talking about, be more likely to ask questions to clarify their learning needs and other concerns, become more effective and interested learners, feel less frustration and achieve better outcomes at school.

### **3) Now, body language---what does a teacher need to know about their body language?**

It's a good idea not to do any finger pointing at students, as it tends to imply blame, and that is not the message we want to get across to students.

Use the 'placater' stance, with an open palm when delivering messages that may be somewhat unpalatable. The 'leveler' stance, with palms down, is useful to apply at the end of a lesson to signal completion. See NLP Essentials For Teachers for diagrams of stances.

The teacher's intent and beliefs will be conveyed in subtle body language that the student will read. A subtle narrowing of the eyes or tightening of the lips, may be interpreted negatively by students. Be aware of body language at all times and use it in a controlled and deliberate way as students will pick up on the micro messages being conveyed by the teacher.

**4) Eye movements seem to be important- can you briefly describe the art and science of reading eye movements?**

There is clear evidence reported in scientific literature that eye movements indicate cognition, sensory-motor integration and internal processing of information. On study showed that a listener will couple their eye movements with the speaker (Richardson, D.C and Dale, R,2005).

The eye accessing cues technique though is specific to NLP. It is used to detect learning style and requires the observer to notice the subtle up-down and side-to-side movements of the eyes.

According to this NLP technique visual learners recall information by looking up and to the left, and construct information by looking up and to their right. Auditory learners look sideways to their right to construct information and sideways to the left to recall information. Learners who mostly learn from self-talk are known as auditory digital and access information by looking down and to their left. Kinesthetic learners mostly look down and to their right side.

The above pattern is commonly observed in a normally organized, right handed person. The sequence of eye movements in a person who is left handed, is likely to be different.

Noticing the subtle changes in the muscles around the eyes, pupil dilation and eye focus is also helpful when communicating with others, as it will indicate whether the speaker is moving into rapport with the listener or not. It gives the teacher the opportunity to adjust what is about to be said before responding to the student's comment or statement.

**5) Are there any colors that seem to be important in the teaching/learning process?**

Studies show that students respond well to calming colors such as blue. Blue helps to keep them cool and centered.

The color red gives off lots of energy and can be a source of distraction, so it is advisable to avoid too much red clothing as students will tend to focus on the clothing, rather than what the teacher is teaching.

**6) Some kids are simply inattentive- what can the normal teacher do?**

Students can be inattentive because they are disinterested. Everybody is interested in something. It is the teacher's job to discover and develop the child's interest in a particular subject by differentiating learning to suit the student.

If the student says that they are not interested in anything, ask, "If you were inspired by this topic, how would it look, sound or feel?" This allows the student to bypass their mental blocks about the subject or about learning in general, and opens the possibility of exploring a whole new world.

Consideration of the student's diet may also need to be a topic of conversation with the student or the student's parents.

### **7) Some messages that teachers send are problematic- can you give us an example of a good message, and a less good message?**

Teachers can give out different messages about their values and beliefs. It is important to send the message to students that they are there for them and that they want to teach them. This can be demonstrated by the consistency of their approach with students and by learning the skill of not take things personally.

Classroom practitioners can benefit from using a positive, yet firm and even tone, which can be achieved by learning to manage their emotions. With this emotional maturity comes the ability to be proactive and demonstrate leadership with students. These teachers will also recognize that students are much more than the behaviors they exhibit and are willing to work with students to clarify their learning needs.

One questioning technique that I have found very useful involves getting students to use their imagination. When teachers ask questions such as, "What did you do over the vacation?" Some students will not respond to that question in a positive manner and may simply shrug their shoulders. A way of getting the students to respond more positively, if they replied, "Nothing", is to then ask, "If you did do something interesting what might that be?" This allows the students to open up their imagination and to feel more empowered.

Teachers can also give out mixed messages about learning. Instead of saying, "That is the wrong answer", ask, "I'm curious as to how you came up with that answer?" This lets the student know that you are not criticizing them personally and that the process of learning is both important and achieved through trial and error.

### **8) Auditory and visual learners- how does a competent NLP teacher approach these different learning styles?**

Firstly the practitioner will identify the learning style of the teachers using the eye calibration tool discussed above, or by observing whether students use

words that describe visual, auditory or kinesthetic actions. For example visual learners may use visual words or phrases such as 'look' or 'view'. A third method of identifying the learning style of students is to observe the representational system of the students. This requires noticing physical and behavioral characteristics of the major representational groups, with specific, unique characteristics being observed in each group - visual, auditory and kinesthetic. I discuss these characteristics in my book, NLP Essentials for Teachers.

Once the students have been identified, each style of learner can receive differentiated instruction, according to their needs.

Visual learners are catered for using visually attractive materials. Auditory learners learn best by listening to and responding to auditory information and kinesthetic learners learn best by doing.

In practice though, but using multi-modal instruction teachers will cater for a wide range of learning styles.

**9) Boys and girls- males and females---what does a good teacher need to know about communicating with each sex, as well as the entire class?**

An effective teacher will:

- Set the content and context for learning in a organized manner, with progression from one lesson to the next.
- Establish clearly defined outcomes for learning.
- Uses positive language and assumes the student will want to participate as long as the teacher is engaged in a responsive manner and differentiates learning to suit the needs of the students.
- Use open questions to encourage the student to imagine.
- Add metaphors and story telling to engage the students and break up the lesson into left-brain and right-brain activities.
- Create a warm, friendly, fair and firm tone in the classroom that encourages students to experiment and feel safe about making "mistakes".
- Use language the student can relate to and listens to students.
- Encourages students to ask questions and gives relevant, respectful feedback.
- Uses different modalities to explain concepts and teach lessons.
- Has a heightened sense of awareness in the classroom.

The aware teacher will also recognize that girls generally respond to more passive tasks for longer periods of time than boys, and boys can learn more effectively when engaged in active tasks.

Girls also tend to have a greater range of interests than boys and tend to be

better at multi-tasking. Boys tend to focus more deeply on a smaller range of pursuits. Traditionally, of course this was hunting.

**10) It seems that teachers are increasingly confronted with a more diverse group of students. What does a good teacher, trained in NLP need to know and do?**

Teachers need firstly to decide that they want to teach, as teaching requires lots of energy and focus and have an interest in the subject matter that they are required to present to students. Secondly, teachers need to assume that all students can learn if given sequential, stimulating, differentiated instruction in a caring, calm environment.

Teachers then need to use purposeful, responsive, specific and targeted language with matching body language. This is very helpful when teaching and also as a tool for proactive behavior management.

Traditionally teacher training has focused on the what, the curriculum. National curricula, has become more prescriptive around the world, and the what, of teaching is now largely catered for.

NLP techniques now give the opportunity to concentrate more on the how of learning. With the needs of learners becoming more complex, the teacher who has awareness of their own learning and teaching style and how learner's learn, will have greater opportunity to provide for a diverse group of learners.

**11)What have I neglected to ask?**

I have added a couple of ways that teachers can use to communicate more effectively with their students.

One way for teachers to communicate effectively with their students is by using very powerful questioning techniques. Questioning allows student and teacher to enter each other's world and clarify the situation or issue. By being ready with inspiring questions and preparing and practicing open-ended scripts, teachers will enjoy eliciting responses from students that encourages and motivates them to want to learn. Teachers need to ask questions to clarify what the student's learning needs are, and to allow them to express their feelings about issues that are obstructing them from learning. Always give wait time to process higher order questions.

Another technique is metaphors or storytelling that has long been a favorite method teachers have used down through the ages. NLP has highlighted the fact that telling stories goes deep into the brain and bypasses any resistance to learning.