

NLP and education research report

presented at the education show

Richard Churches and Paul Tosey update ANLP members about some leading-edge NLP research

CfBT Education Trust has just published a 115-page research report into the impact of NLP, co-authored by John Carey, Geraldine Hutchinson, Jeff Jones and ourselves.

A foreword by John West-Burnham (Professor of Educational Leadership, St Mary's University College) describes the research as '...a balance of authoritative thinking about the nature of the learning process combined with compelling and convincing case studies.'

The research was presented at the at the Education Show (NEC Birmingham) on March 6th to a packed audience of delegates and will be the subject of two conference presentations at the Second International NLP Research Conference at Cardiff University on 3rd July 2010.

The paper, titled 'Neuro-linguistic programming and learning: teacher case studies on the impact of NLP in education', reports on evidence from 24 teacher-led action research case studies. It builds on the CfBT Education Trust paper published in 2008 by Richard Churches and John West-Burnham, called 'Leading learning through relationships: the implications of Neurolinguistic programming for personalisation and the children's agenda in England'.

The new research focused on two gaps in the research literature:

- The absence of any formal and systematic literature review of evidence in relation to the impact and use of NLP in education
- The lack of any substantive teacher-led and classroom-based action research in this area.

To ensure a consistent approach, we chose to use the General Teaching Council of England (GTCE)'s 'Teacher Learning Academy' (TLA) framework as a process structure for designing and implementing their research (CfBT Education Trust was closely involved in the development of this framework). This meant that, should the teachers wish, they could submit their write-up to the TLA for professional recognition of their work. So far three teachers have submitted their work and achieved accreditation at Level 1. One teacher has taken this further and is currently engaged in a Masters programme at the University of Newcastle that is focused on the theory and practice of NLP in the primary classroom.

Teachers were given a choice as to which parts of the NLP training they focused on for their case study write-ups. However, as is noted above, all the teachers were trained in a number of areas of NLP and most made use of a wider range of learning than has been included in



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the actual research.

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Most teachers focused on whole classroom evidence, others on individual children, and a few of the case studies contain evidence for both. Some case studies targeted an evaluation of a single technique (e.g. the research by Rachael Coull which focused on the use of anchoring) whilst others looked at the effect of a wide range of areas – as in the case study by Simon Potter which discusses: anchoring, meta model questioning, Milton model language patterns, non-verbal communication, rapport, submodalities and the use of the well formed outcome process.

Teachers were positive in their comments across the full age range from Nursery classes to Year 13 students. There is also a spread of contexts from small rural primary school to large urban secondary school. Although there are some variations in the extent to which teachers found training in NLP useful, all of the case studies below indicate evidence in relation to either the development of interpersonal skills (the ability to communicate with and influence others) or intrapersonal capacity (self-management, personal capacity and the management of emotions). In many cases teachers also reported significant change in the behaviour of both individual children and classes. Even where one teacher had been unable to note specific effects on class behaviour (such as in the research by Stephanie Kidd) they still nonetheless were able to identify improvements in their own feelings about their capacity to deal with classroom situations. Typical commentary includes things such as the

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following by Joanna Dobson and Helen Fuhr:

Through our discussions we have observed that NLP enables students to engage and contribute usefully to lessons. Students have been able to explain themselves more clearly and are able to problem solve and bring themselves to suitable and workable solutions through guidance and communication with the teacher. There has been a significant improvement in the levels of confidence shown by pupils in the classroom and this has led to increased motivation which has manifested itself both in improved contribution and work rate in class and improved quality of homework. Joanna Dobson and Helen Fuhr, St Benet Biscop High School

The other major contribution of the paper is the first systematic and comprehensive literature review of research evidence into the impact of NLP in education. This discusses the contents of 111 papers and references, which include quantitative and qualitative research evidence. The majority of published work was found to be supportive of the use of NLP in schools and education although, as the authors point out, this should only be considered as an interim finding because

of the wide range of methods used and variations in the quality of some of the research.

It is sometimes implied that there is little or no evidence base for areas of teacher professional practice such as NLP or in relation to NLP in general. However, as the systematic review demonstrates, there has been a growing and developing education literature which refers to both adults and children right from the time of the publication of the earliest popular books on NLP and teaching and learning. Furthermore, criticisms (where they exist) are often made at a theoretical or 'in principle' level rather than from an evidence-based position.

The review highlighted two other issues:

- What NLP research literature there is, is rarely cross-referenced to, or cited within, the NLP-informed research, even though some topics have been researched before and the results are accessible.
- Few researchers or commentators have carried out any form of literature review prior to the conducting of research. ■



The full research paper is available to download from the ANLP website at www.anlp.org For further information about this research contact Richard Churches at rchurches@cfbt.com

Richard Churches is Principal Consultant for National Programmes at CfBT Education Trust. He co-wrote the highly acclaimed NLP for Teachers: How to be a highly effective teacher and The NLP Toolkit: For teachers, trainers and school leaders with Roger Terry. Richard is also the author of the Effective Classroom Communication Teachers' Pocketbook, and a further book, the Brain and Learning Teachers' Pocketbook, written with Eleanor Dommett (Open University and Oxford University) and Ian Devonshire (Institute for the Future of the Mind, Oxford University), will be available in January 2011.

Paul Tosey is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Management at Surrey University. He is a leading authority on the academic appraisal of NLP and co-author with Jane Mathison of Neuro-Linguistic Programming: A Critical Appreciation for Managers and Developers. He chaired the First International NLP Research Conference in 2008 and is editor of the ANLP journal, 'Current Research in NLP'.