

The NLP Professional (Part 6)

Scope of practice

By Karen Moxom

As a practitioner, it is so important to be aware of your scope of practice, i.e. know what you are capable of handling in a professional situation. However well qualified and experienced a practitioner is, they may not have the right experience to deal with every issue which arises.

When I received my certificate to prove I was an NLP Practitioner, I was excited I had qualified. Everything I had been working towards came together when I received my NLP Practitioner certificate...and then I stepped out into the real world. What, exactly, did this qualification mean? What, specifically, was I qualified to do?

To be honest, when I received my NLP Practitioner certificate, I felt qualified to manage my own life much better than I could some months earlier. In hindsight, I now understand this particular training was designed with this purpose in mind, so I did come out with what I expected, as did everyone else on my course. We all knew and understood we had been enlightened and educated in some really useful strategies for managing our own lives.

The thought of putting 'NLP Practitioner' on my business card briefly crossed my mind, and was instantly dismissed again – I had attended a fairly short course in NLP, and my initial outcome for attending the course had been achieved. I had, however, discovered along the way NLP was immensely powerful and really was making a difference to my life in a way no other personal development training course had done.

I personally did not want to put NLP Practitioner on my business card because I did not feel I was in any

way qualified to practice my NLP on other people and advertise I was doing so. As I became more unconsciously competent and more confident, I did find I was using my NLP to enhance my work as a management accountant and accounts trainer.

One of the questions we are asked by newly qualified practitioners is: 'Am I a therapist now?'

The short answer is no, probably not.

I was very aware receiving my NLP Practitioner certificate did not qualify me as a therapist of any sort. Given the dictionary definition of a therapist is 'a person who treats physical, mental or social disorders or disease', and the definition of a practitioner is 'a person who practises a profession or art', there are very few NLP qualifications which will automatically qualify you as a therapist.

NLP and coaching differ from therapy because they start with a belief the client is ok, well and whole, and simply wants some help moving from where they are now to where they would like to be. Therapy can be more about delving into the past and analysing the smallest things in great detail, unpicking them so it is possible to understand the impact of past experiences.

As part of this journey, it may be NLP will be used to alter one's view of past events and reframe them in some way so they become more manageable and have less effect on current behaviours, but NLP can be content free, whereas therapists do include references to the specific content.

Another reframe is to look upon therapy and NLP coaching as being presented with a packet of sunflower seeds and a garden which looks ready for planting. NLP

and coaching will assume the soil is ok and ready for planting in, and an NLP coach will support the gardener to achieve their dream of having a garden full of sunflowers by next summer.

The therapist will help the gardener dig over the soil first, take out all the stones, analyse the soil quality and make sure the ground is thoroughly prepared and weed free before planting the seeds.

As a gardener, I know both methods have their place – it is perfectly possible to plant the seeds without any soil preparation and nurture those seeds as they grow, watering them and pulling up the small weeds as they appear. And this



“ We had been educated in some really useful strategies for managing our own lives ”

is all which is needed to achieve a beautiful garden full of sunflowers, because the soil was healthy and ready to grow seeds.

Sometimes, it really doesn't matter how well the seeds are nurtured, the sunflower seeds do not grow tall and straight because there is something lurking in the soil which prevents this from happening. The soil looked fine when we started, but something is affecting the progress of the seeds.

Sometimes, NLP and coaching can quite easily deal with the something by clearing the limiting belief or asking powerful questions. And sometimes, regardless of our own and our client's capabilities, we do need to call in the soil expert.

Some of the confusion surrounding NLP and whether or not one is qualified as a therapist stems from the modelling projects first undertaken by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. Bandler and Grinder modelled therapists – Virginia Satir, the psychotherapist responsible for introducing family therapy; Fritz Perls, the psychiatrist and psychotherapist who introduced gestalt therapy; and Milton Erickson, a psychiatrist who had a big influence on hypnosis and family therapy.

Bandler and Grinder used these models to demonstrate if the strategies used by therapists were broken down enough into their constituent parts, then it was possible to replicate some of the results achieved

“NLP and coaching start with a belief the client is ok, well and whole”

by these therapists, i.e. they demonstrated the art of modelling excellence.

It is perfectly possible to achieve great results modelling the excellence of therapists and this is what makes NLP so effective in many different areas. NLP has been greatly influenced by the work of these successful therapists and is all about modelling some of the excellent strategies used by therapists in order to achieve results. This is not the same as saying you are a therapist.

There are many other elements which are required in order to qualify as a therapist, in just the same way as there are many other elements required to turn me into as successful a runner as Roger Bannister, the first person to run a 4 minute mile. I can model his strategies and work out the 'difference that makes the difference', and this will, I am sure, improve my average times for running a mile. I do also need some other things in order to be at the next Olympics, standing next to the other athletes in the final – peak fitness levels, training and some initial talent would certainly help.

To clarify, as far as the Association for NLP is concerned, obtaining an NLP certificate only qualifies you as an NLP therapist when you have met the rigorous requirements of United Kingdom Council



for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapy and Counselling Association (NLPtCA). The UKCP website states: 'NLP techniques are often utilised to instigate change and enhance personal growth, development and performance in groups and organisations, and with individuals. NLP techniques are not always suitable in addressing complex psychological difficulties or distress.'

This is an understandable statement when you consider to qualify as an NLP Practitioner usually takes somewhere between 50 and 125 hours and will usually include a combination of study and practice. To qualify as an NLP psychotherapist takes over 2,300 hours and includes a combination of training, supervision, client contact, observation and self directed learning...of which only a small part is achieving Practitioner and Master Practitioner qualifications.

It is perfectly possible to add your NLP qualification to your existing therapist qualifications, in order to enhance your existing therapeutic practice. I know of many NLP Practitioners who use their NLP to enhance their specific qualifications as a GP, a psychologist, or a psychiatrist, and many others who have undertaken the rigorous training to qualify as a NLP psychotherapist. These people all use their NLP to enhance their existing knowledge and skills and thereby give an even better and more rounded service to their patients. ■

Tip: Be clear about what your own NLP qualifications enable you to do in practice. If you would like further clarification, talk to your trainer or contact ANLP for impartial advice.

