

**Assessment Component No. 2 (Written assignment) Independent Study –
Exploration of theories and methodologies from an NLP Master Practitioner
Programme**

Alannah Britz

Student number: 2029338

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how language helps shape our understanding of the world, both in how we process, and how we express our experiences. It also considers how working with a client's language can increase their self-awareness and support positive change. More specifically I will critically reflect on two language-focussed theories and methodologies I experienced in the Master Practitioner programme in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and how I have applied them personally and in my practice as a coach and trainer.

To aid my exploration I have used Atkins and Murphy's (2018) model of reflection and draw connections with other fields of study including Narrative coaching, Symbolic modelling, and Positive Psychology.

INTRODUCING ATKINS & MURPHY'S MODEL OF REFLECTION

Developed in 1994, Atkins & Murphy's Model of Reflection (NursingAnswers.net 2018) aims to gather insight from experiences to guide future actions. The model, comprising of five parts, encourages a step-by-step reflection process as shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Atkins & Murphy's Model of Reflection
(NursingAnswers.net 2018)

The first part of the model is 'awareness', viewing emotions in response to an experience as an indicator of an opportunity for learning; the following three parts of the model are then used to describe, analyse and evaluate the experience; the final part considers how the learning gathered can guide future actions (NursingAnswers.net 2018). In this paper I will apply 'awareness', the first part of the cycle in the section 'My motivation for completing the NLP Master Practitioner' with the following three parts applied to the sections exploring each model, and the final 'identify any learning' part applied in the conclusion.

MY MOTIVATION FOR COMPLETING THE NLP MASTER PRACTITIONER PROGRAMME

Awareness

The NLP Practitioner Programme significantly enriched my knowledge base and introduced me to new fields of learning, however, I also recognised the discomfort that Atkins and Murphy (2018) refer to in their reflective model. On reflection I realised that with what I had learned I had also become acutely aware of how much more there is to discover.

I had an increased appreciation for the insight we can gain from our own and someone else's language and echoing Fölscher-Kingwill and Terblanche's view (2019) that language is one of the most extensive and dynamic ingredients in coaching I particularly wanted to further expand my knowledge on how I can consciously use language as a means of supporting positive change. Based on my understanding of the programme outline (Madden 2017), I felt the NLP Master Practitioner would help expand my knowledge, providing a deeper understanding of the NLP models that focus on working with an individual, or teams through their language to help effect the change they are looking for.

A NOTE ON NLP AND ETHICS

In both the NLP Practitioner and NLP Master Practitioner ethical consideration was stressed given how the techniques can work at such a deeply personal level (Britz 2022a).

In the NLP Master Practitioner some of the techniques require working directly with the unconscious mind (Madden 2017) and so "Ecology Checks"¹ (Britz 2022a) are even more important to ensure the client's support. As an accredited member of the Association of NLP

¹ An Ecology Check is a set of questions used by a practitioner to ensure the client is fully aware and willing to undertake a specific NLP technique.

(ANLP) and as an accredited coach with the ICF (International Coaching Federation) I am committed to ethical practice both in my coaching and training.

INTRODUCING NLP AND ITS APPROACH TO LANGUAGE

As I explored in an earlier paper, NLP was first developed by Richard Bandler and John Grinder in the 1970's exploring the connections between our brain's processing patterns and our use of language to make sense of our experiences, the combination of which drive our resulting behaviour (Britz 2022a). Bandler and Grinder combined their respective areas of expertise in linguistics and mathematics to observe and model the works of a number of renowned therapists and academics including Virginia Satir, one of the founders of family therapy, Fritz Perls, co-founder of Gestalt therapy² (Madden and Sarantinou 2019) and hypnotherapist Milton Erickson (Britz 2022a).

In discussing the early development of NLP, Cox et. al (2014) refer to Bandler and Grinder's observation of the powerful interplay between the conscious and unconscious mind in forming an internal understanding of our personal experiences. Bandler and Grinder's thinking was also shaped by the observation that our unconscious mind uses a set of cognitive filters that delete, distort and generalise information gathered through our senses to create our unique understanding or 'map' of the world (Dilts and DeLozier 2021).

Another core shaping influence for NLP has been the field of Linguistics, in particular the work of linguist Noam Chomsky³ (Bandler and Grinder 1975) who explored how our language reveals our internal understanding or 'maps' of the world. In his work Chomsky analysed everyday language identifying an underlying structure he termed Transformational grammar (Pinker 2015). He maintained that our language exists at two levels – surface structure and deep structure as depicted in Figure 2 below (Bandler and Grinder 1975).

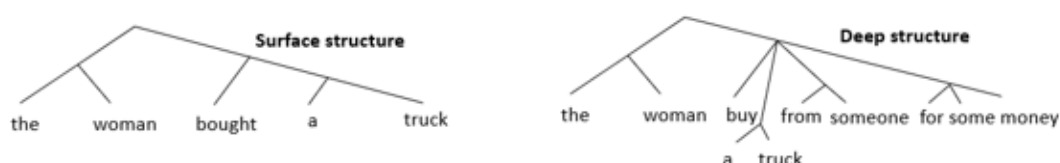


Figure 2: Chomsky's Transformational Grammar model of Deep and Surface structure
(Bandler and Grinder 1975)

² A psychotherapeutic practice that encourages a patient to explore their emotions in a particular moment to gain awareness of themselves.

³ A linguist considered by many to be a pioneer in the exploration of language and cognitive science.

Pinker (2015) explains Surface structure (shown in Figure 2 above) as the language we use to express a thought, and Deep structure as the full representation of a person's understanding of the topic that thought came from. As can be seen in Figure 2, in the process of expressing a thought, it moves from Deep to Surface structure and in doing so the language undergoes a transformation where certain semantic elements are deleted while still seemingly retaining the same meaning (Pinker 2015). Bandler and Grinder (1975) built on Chomsky's theory, asserting that the same cognitive filters used to create the Deep structure also shapes content as it moves from Deep to Surface structure, and so how one expresses a thought can actually change that thought in the process.

A number of works on NLP explore how the theory of Transformational Grammar, with its Deep and Surface structure, helped inform the NLP view that we use language firstly to make sense of our experiences to ourselves, forming our own understanding or 'picture' of the world, and secondly to express, or communicate our experiences (Bandler and Grinder 1975, Madden and Sarantinou 2019, Dilts and DeLozier 2021). Madden and Sarantinou (2019) further explain in their overview of NLP how this thinking was core to the development of NLP principles, methodologies and tools to help individuals achieve positive personal change, working with our surface structure language to give insight into and, the ability to work with, what might exist at the deep structure level.

CRITICAL REFLECTION OF THE META MODEL

Description

In his book *Coaching for Performance* Whitmore (2010) maintains that the purpose of a coach is to help an individual build awareness, autonomy and confidence. To support this one of a coach's first acts is to gain an understanding of a client's current 'map' of the world. However, as Bandler and Grinder (1975) observed, at the start of a conversation we do not know if what we hear is a summarised Surface structure version as per the theory of Transformational grammar, or whether the client's Deep structure or 'map' itself might have pieces distorted or missing creating an incomplete view of a situation.

It was this observation that Bandler and Grinder (1975) explained led them to use Transformational grammar to develop the Meta model. Comprising a set of language patterns that help indicate a potentially incomplete or distorted understanding of a situation,

the model also reflects Korzybski's⁴ theory "the map is not the territory" (Dilts and DeLozier 2021 pg 733), that is our perception of reality is just that, a perception and isn't necessarily the situation itself. The risk is that with those missing or distorted parts of a person's map influencing their perception of the world an individual might form limiting assumptions about their choices in a situation (Zamfir 2019). To help an individual challenge these assumptions a set of 'precision questions' were developed to give more 'precise' focus on the specifics of a situation for an individual to obtain a clearer understanding of their experience enriching their map of the world (Knight 2014). An overview of the Meta model including the precision questions is depicted in Figure 3 below (Madden and Sarantinou 2019).

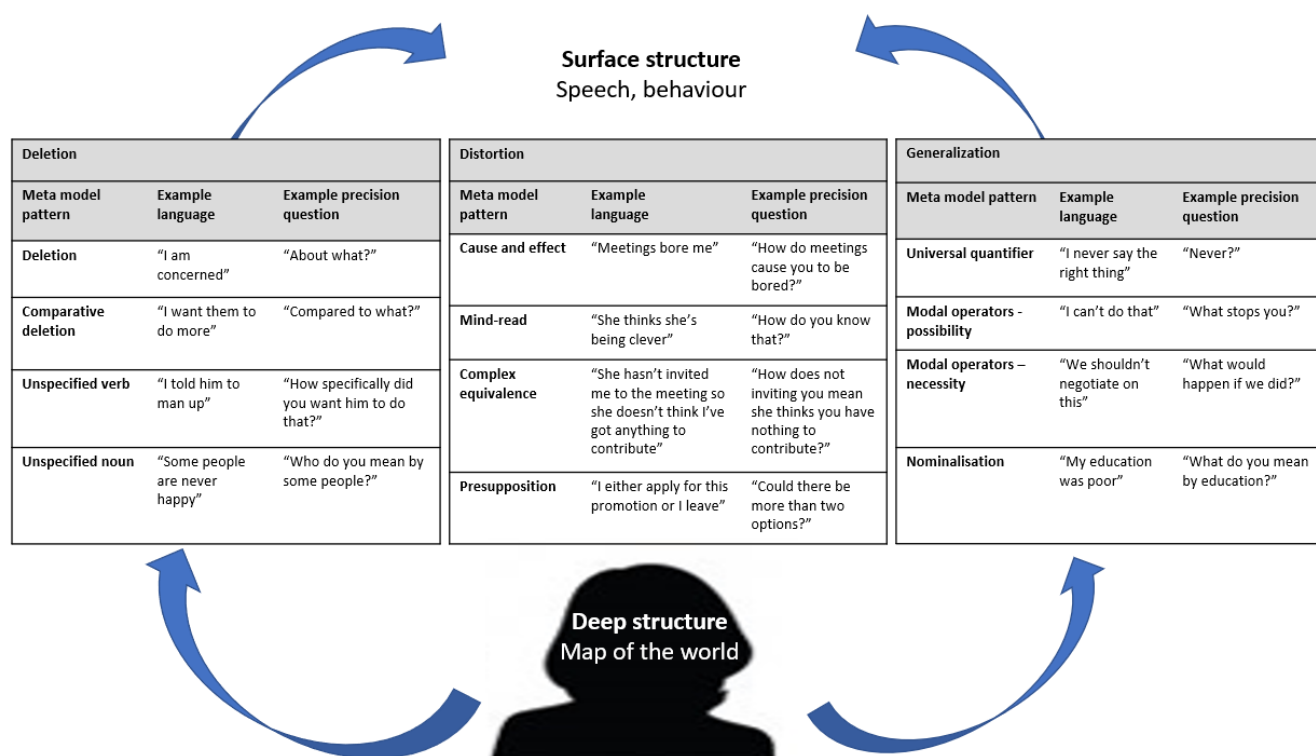


Figure 3: Meta model patterns and Precision questions
(Madden and Sarantinou 2019)

While Cox et al. (2014) explore the Meta model in the coaching context, Wake (2011) posited the Meta model can also be applied in the workplace helping teams challenge and expand their thinking on a topic. Similarly in *NLP at Work* Knight (2014) explores how the Meta model can help improve interactions in the workplace.

⁴ Alfred Korzybski, a scientist and philosopher, considered creator of general semantics and studied individuals' use and response to language.

Analysis of feelings and knowledge

In the NLP Master Practitioner programme we explored the Meta model, first with the instructor providing theory and context, followed by exercises where we analysed conversation scripts to identify the Meta model patterns and practised the precision questions (Madden 2017). Through the remainder of the programme we found ourselves integrating our learning by gently identifying Meta model patterns as we heard them in the language of our fellow students, encouraging each other to challenge any potential underlying limiting assumptions.

Since learning about the Meta model I have become increasingly conscious of how frequently these patterns appear in our everyday language. This knowledge has personally benefited me, helping increase awareness of my own map, alerting me to perceptions that weren't helping me and, in challenging my thinking, revealing options on how I can move forward. Another personal benefit is in my capacity as coach and trainer. As Ianiro and Kauffeld (2014) discuss a coach's communication both verbal and non-verbal can influence the coaching process, and with my understanding of the Meta model I am now more mindful and intentional with my language as a coach and trainer. The process of listening for the Meta model patterns has also helped sharpen my acuity, which Whitmore (2010) described as such a vital coaching capability.

In applying the precision questions I echo the view of Madden and Sarantinou (2019) that they are a useful tool to help a client explore an experience to expand their perspective. In using Atkins & Murphy's Model of Reflection (NursingAnswers.net 2018) I am reminded of how Fölscher-Kingwill and Terblanche describe coaching as a "trigger" (2019, pg 162) and I see that in the 'aha' moment with clients when, in considering a question, they suddenly notice the gap or distortion in their thinking, a turning point in helping them identify other options to move forward (Britz 2021).

While the Meta model is a powerful tool to help identify and challenge limiting assumptions (Zamfir 2019), I agree with Knight (2014), and Madden and Sarantinou (2019) that the precision questions need to be handled carefully and only when deep rapport with the client is in place to avoid the client feeling interrogated. Another element that I believe requires careful management is when, as Caufield described (2014), a client displays more than one Meta model pattern, and I am faced with the dilemma of which one to focus on in my questioning.

Through my subsequent exposure to Positive psychology⁵ (Positivepsychology.com 2022) in my Transformational coaching qualification, I discovered another pattern of language which has helped me with this dilemma and to honour my ethical commitment to a client-led process (coachingfederation.org 2022). According to the ICF (coachingfederation.org 2022) clear contracting with a client, clarifying what they would like to discuss, is a key element of the coaching relationship. However, a client may not yet have a conscious understanding of their need and so a coach must listen for the true 'expression of desire', an often unconscious articulation of what an individual is really wanting in that situation that emerges as a repeating pattern of language (Coach Master Academy 2020). To support a client's forward-looking focus, they are encouraged to positively articulate their 'expression of desire', focussing on what they want to gain rather than avoid (Coach Master Academy 2020). For example, a recent client first expressed a desire as "I don't want to feel out of control", and in exploring that further, they re-orientated it to be "I want to find balance" (Britz 2021). What I have observed is that by surfacing the 'expression of desire' first and articulating it positively, it appears the client is more open in exploring the Meta model patterns and replacing limiting assumptions with positive options (Britz 2021).

Building on the knowledge imparted through the NLP Master Practitioner, another model I have integrated into my practice that works with the structure of our language is that of Narrative coaching. The Narrative coaching model developed by Drake (2007) takes a holistic approach, viewing an individual's stories as the language structure that reveals their view of the world, and the vehicle for creating more helpful perspectives of themselves in it. Also inspired in part by the work of Virginia Satir (Drake 2018), Narrative coaches focus on how an individual is seeing themselves and others in their interpretation of events and how, by reconfiguring those character roles or positions, the client might gain increased options (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck 2014).

I have found myself drawing on a combination of Meta model, Transformational coaching and the Narrative coaching approach with my clients (Britz 2021). For example, a client experiencing a significant change at work revealed Meta model patterns implying no control in the situation. First surfacing their expression of desire, 'to find a way of dealing with the change', we explored some of the Meta model patterns evident in their language. In doing so their perspective of the situation first expanded, and then their perception of the role they

⁵ Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning including strengths and resilience with the aim of increasing our understanding of what enables individuals and communities to flourish.

might play in that situation shifted from one of inaction to one of positive and empowered action (Britz 2021). I observed a shift in their self-efficacy (belief of one's own capability in a specific task) which Gessnitzer, Schulte, Kauffeld (2016) describe as an important role of the coaching process. And with this altered narrative they subsequently took a more proactive role in the change providing both an individual sense of autonomy as well as benefiting the organisation through their contribution (Britz 2021).

Similarly, I have found the combination of Meta model and Narrative approach useful in working with teams such as an exercise where participants consider some of their more challenging stakeholders and explore what assumptions they might be making, what language they use in referring to them and how this shapes the type of narrative they might be telling themselves and the organisation about those stakeholders (Britz 2020). In one instance I had a team notice certain Meta model patterns in their language and in examining this they realised they had been omitting certain details from their stakeholder analysis. This had distorted the narrative they had been telling both themselves and the organisation, ultimately impacting how the stakeholder was engaged. With what Vogel (2012) explains as narrative awareness, they were able to expand their viewpoint and in doing so access more options on how to manage the stakeholder with positive results (Britz 2020).

Evaluation

What I learned about the Meta model in the NLP Master Practitioner programme and my subsequent experience applying it in my training and coaching practice has provided me with a deeper understanding of how our language reflects and shapes our understanding of the world (Dilts and DeLozier 2021). In particular, I found Bandler and Grinder's (1975) application of Chomsky's theories on Transformational grammar in the Meta model very helpful both in my professional practice and personal life in listening for, and unpacking, the what we say (Surface structure) and what we really believe (Deep structure). The Meta model precision questions are also a powerful tool to become more conscious aware of our language and identifying where we might be making assumptions to clarify and enrich our perception of the world (Zamfir 2019).

I have also found the Meta model works well in conjunction with the Narrative coaching methodology and the positively orientated approach of Positive psychology. I now often first work with a client to identify their 'expression of desire' (Coach Master Academy 2020), then use Bandler and Grinder's Meta model patterns (1975) to help a client become more specifically conscious of what they are telling themselves about a situation, and then use Drake's Narrative approach (2018) to consider what type of story that language is reflecting.

Echoing Vogel's observations (2012), with this awareness I find they are then able to consider what type of story they want to be living and in doing so identify options on how to transfer that narrative into action.

However, in applying the Meta model, in particular the use of precision questions I am also reminded of the importance of some of the foundational principles of coaching including building and maintaining rapport (Madden and Sarantinou 2019), ensuring the interaction is client-led (coachingfederation.org 2022), and driven by the intent to progress their personal learning (Ianiro and Kauffeld 2019).

CRITICAL REFLECTION OF METAPHOR

Description

It is considered by many that language is a key component of our ability to think and to communicate (Pinker 2015, Thibodeau, Hendricks and Boroditsky 2017, Madden and Sarantinou 2019, Dilts and DeLozier 2021). In reflecting on this further Thibodeau et. al (2017) discussed that one might assume specific language to be the best, and yet on examining everyday communication, they found our language rich with metaphor and vital in helping us understand intangible concepts. This view is echoed in the description of metaphor by Fetterman et al. (2021) as the ability to process emotions and the observation of Sullivan and Rees (2015) that as the world itself becomes more complex metaphor is an increasingly important means of helping make sense of it.

In defining metaphors Ding et al. (2020) describe it as the process of using the tangible attributes of one thing (eg. temperature, weight, shape) to think or talk about something more intangible (eg. emotion, morality or relationships). This concept of transference is also visible in how Dilts and DeLozier (2021) depict metaphors comprising of three distinct parts which the attribute of one transferring onto the other as outlined in Figure 4 below.

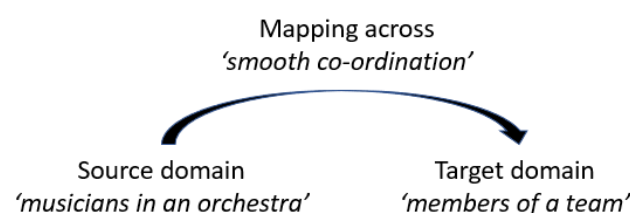


Figure 4: Structure of a metaphor
(Dilts and DeLozier 2021)

Dilts and DeLozier (2021) explain the linguist George Lakoff's view, that in the process of using metaphor to describe a reality (as outlined in Figure 4), it in fact shapes our perception of reality. One then is led to consider how by changing the metaphor one might change our perception of that reality as claimed by Fetterman et al. (2021). This was demonstrated in the research of Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) exploring the influence of metaphor in reasoning, where they found that for example in the case of crime management, people were more likely to support reform versus enforcement approaches when crime was described as a 'virus' rather than as a 'beast'.

From an NLP perspective, metaphors are core to our human understanding with 'shallow metaphor' present in our Surface structure language and 'deep metaphor' forming part of our Deep structure language (Dilts and DeLozier 2021). Milton Erickson, a key influence in the shaping of NLP, used metaphor and stories extensively when working with patients' unconscious (Madden and Sarantinou 2019). He used broad and suggestive language that Bandler and Grinder described as "artful vagueness" (Madden and Sarantinou 2019, pg 209) to help trigger creative thinking in order to free patients from limiting assumptions. An example of an NLP technique that incorporates both metaphor and creative thinking in working directly with the unconscious is the Parts Integration technique (Madden 2017). Madden and Sarantinou (2019) explain Parts Integration as a process that acknowledges that we all have different parts to ourselves and sometimes these parts can be in conflict with each other manifesting in language such as 'I feel torn', or 'One part of me wants this, but the other part of me is wanting something different'. They share that the technique connects directly with an individual's unconscious in a trance-like state working with each part using metaphoric description.

Analysis of feelings and knowledge

In both the NLP Practitioner Programme and the NLP Master Practitioner Programme metaphors were integrated in the teaching structure, for example using metaphoric stories such as those used by Erickson to open and close the day of learning (Madden 2015, Madden 2017). In addition, we were challenged to write our own metaphoric stories, some for ourselves and some as gifts for our fellow students (Madden 2015, Madden 2017). On reflection those stories significantly inspired and encourage my learning process through the programme.

In experiencing it first-hand on the course and subsequently using it with clients I also found the Parts Integration technique immensely powerful. As is demonstrated in the coaching

recording accompanying this paper, the Parts Integration technique invites an individual's unconscious to use metaphors, ascribing sensory descriptions to make more tangible the different conflicting 'parts' (Britz 2022). With sensory metaphoric descriptions those intangible 'parts' of their unconscious can be worked with to resolve the conflict and achieve 'wholeness' (Madden and Sarantinou 2019). Each time I use this technique with a client I am struck by what Fölscher-Kingwill and Terblanche (2019) explained as the ability for metaphor to make real highly intangible and unexplored elements of our unconscious.

The pioneering work of David Grove first codified by Lawley and Tompkins (2021) demonstrated another deeply impactful way of working with an individual's metaphor. In Grove's work with trauma patients he observed that we all have unique metaphors to help make sense of our world and that when working with someone, rather than inserting our own metaphors on their map, meaningful change is far more effective when working directly in the individuals' own metaphor (Lawley and Tompkins 2021). Grove referred to his approach as Clean language, using a set of questions that kept his words to a minimum, working instead as purely as possible with the client's language (Sullivan and Rees 2015, Lawley and Tompkins 2021). As discussed in their book *Metaphors in Mind* Lawley and Tompkins (2021) modelled this approach combining it with cognitive linguistics, systems theory and NLP to create Symbolic modelling. They maintain that in an individual's metaphoric map words have specific relevance and indicate thinking patterns as well as potential ways to transform current perception. As part of their approach to work within a client's map Lawley and Tompkins (2021) suggest "repeating their words exactly, selecting words and phrases, backtracking, and accumulating a number of the client's descriptions" (2021, pg 61). In applying this approach I have experienced what I believe is an increased speed and ease in the client's ability to navigate their issue and find solutions (Britz 2021). I have also found this technique particularly helpful when working with clients of a different culture where English is not their first language. I believe that by working specifically with their words enables us to stay in their map of the world and avoids potential misinterpretation or insertion of my understanding into their map (Britz 2021).

While Lawley and Tompkins' Symbolic modelling approach (2021) works with a client's self-created metaphor I have also found the use of Clean language effective when used in conjunction with another metaphor methodology, that of the Sailboat metaphor (positivepsychology.com 2022). Developed as a tool in the field of Positive psychology, the sailboat is a metaphoric frame as shown in Figure 5a (positivepsychology.com 2022), and invites individuals to create their own version as shown in Figure 5b below (Britz 2021).



Figure 5a: The Sailboat metaphor
(Positivenesspsychology.com 2022)

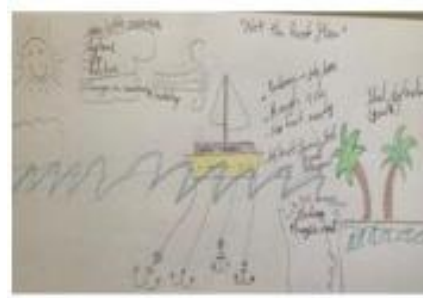


Figure 5b: A client's depiction of their sailboat
(Britz 2021)

I have found this tool effective in introductory sessions helping me get a sense of the client's current map of the world and in doing so also establish a baseline from which to map their progress. Clients have also echoed what Ding et al. (2020) maintained, that the metaphoric nature of the exercise helps them articulate concepts and emotions that would have been harder to express in words only (Britz 2021). For example, a client experiencing several significant changes depicted themselves as a small sailboat with a tsunami wave behind them (Britz 2021). Similar to the findings of Fölscher-Kingwill and Terblanche (2019), articulating their state of mind through the metaphor enabled the client to explore their current reality in a creative way and in doing so allowed them to access alternative perspectives and alter their interpretation. For example, with this client they shifted their metaphor to riding on the wave and with this shift in their metaphoric representation they had a new and far more empowering perspective of their reality (Britz 2021). I believe the process of gaining that perspective was aided by the use of clean questions, being careful to apply the techniques outlined by Lawley and Tompkins (2021), working only with the content the client provides to ask questions that invite further exploration of their perception of reality. I have also found the Sailboat metaphor helpful as a reference point along the coaching journey, with clients reflecting on how their sailboat picture has changed (Britz 2021).

Evaluation

Through the NLP Master Practitioner programme and my subsequent experience I have seen why Thibodeau, Hendricks and Boroditsky (2017) maintain metaphor is an integral part of our language and how we make sense of the world. Further, using methodology such as Symbolic modelling (Lawley and Tompkins 2021) or metaphoric tools such as the Sailboat metaphor (positivenesspsychology.com 2022) I have built on this knowledge to work with a

client's metaphoric language and as Fetterman et al. (2021) said was possible with metaphor, help them gain increased understanding and self-awareness to achieve positive personal change.

I have also experienced the value of using Clean language (Sullivan and Rees 2015), avoiding insertion of my perceptions or assumptions in the coaching process and ensuring the client has a space of trust to safely articulate their maps of the world and find the most resourceful way forward.

CONCLUSION AND IDENTIFYING FUTURE LEARNING

In reflecting on my experience in the NLP Master Practitioner programme and subsequently applying my learning the metaphor of a journey comes to mind. Through what I learned in the programme my eyes were further opened to other fields of enquiry and methodologies such as Drake's Narrative coaching (2018), Clean language (Sullivan and Rees 2015), Symbolic modelling (Lawley and Tompkins 2021) and the use of a variety of metaphoric tools such as the Sailboat (positivepsychology.com 2022). Not only have I personally benefitted in expanding my own self-awareness, but my coaching and training practice has been enriched with this knowledge and skill.

In applying the final step of Atkins and Murphy's Model of Reflection (2018), identifying future learning, as mentioned in my previous paper (Britz 2022a) this MA Professional Practice is a key step in continuing my learning journey. I have already noticed how the process of reflection in writing this paper has helped clarify and embed the concepts further which is enhancing my practice. In terms of my immediate next steps on this learning journey, I am currently coaching a number of clients from different cultures across the globe and in what I have experienced I believe there is even more for me to learn and apply in the use of metaphor in the cross-cultural context.

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