

Educating Adult Educators about Concepts of the Individual's Learning Style and Self-Esteem

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Introduction

We use our five senses to perceive the world and to portray our internal images. Although we simultaneously use all of our perceptual modalities externally, we pay more attention to one or two, depending on what we are dealing with. Surprisingly, when we think, we more frequently prefer using one or two of the representational systems, regardless of the object of thought. By the time we reach the age of eleven or twelve, we have already established clear preferences, known as one's Dominant (or Preferred) Representational Type or Perceptual Modality, which affect the way we learn and communicate with other people, thus forming our personal preferred Learning (and thus teaching) Style (Fleming & Mills, 2007).

Under the influence of others (Bandura, 1977) and via the inter-personal communication where the similarity between the dominant representational type of the participants plays an important role, the self-concept is being formed (Botsaris, 2001; Erikson, 1963; Tsiros, 2006, 9a). The self-concept, which exists as an undercurrent of expectations and non-logical ideas, can play a role in the state of one's mental health, the burnout of educators, and one's learning process (Ellis, 1973; Maslach, 1986; Mezirow, 1991).

One of the types of self-concept is the Academic Self-concept which is also known as the Concept of Learning. The Academic Self-concept has been identified by Bandler (1982) as a formation of representations of procedures. Papadatos (2003) identified it as a change of one's self due to new knowledge. And Tsiros (2006) identified it as a result of the effectiveness of the inter-personal communication between the teacher and his students.

These concepts belong to the Dominant Representational Type as well as overall self-esteem. In our view, of particular importance in transformative learning as it is applied in adult education (Mezirow, 1991). A cognitive scheme in educating the adult educator (based on the above theoretical aspects and the evaluation which followed a series of in service training seminars, conducted by the same trainer, on the same subject, in 60 groups which they were attended more than 2000 educators) is being presented and discussed in this research report.

This cognitive scheme was evaluated by the adult learners using a questionnaire (Tsiros, 2009f). Quantitative findings which resulted from the statistical analysis of their answers showed a positive attitude among the high majority at all criteria. Intense interest was shown on behalf of the participants for the continuation of their education in the fields of the self-esteem, learning style,

and the teacher's communication skills, on the teaching effectiveness and the confrontation of the teachers' burn out in the direction of redefining the quality in adult education.

Concept Identification

Dominant (or Preferred) Representational Type

Dominant Representational Type (concept and questionnaire) is an approach to the way each individual perceives the external world using his/her perceptions. This concept represents internally the external data formatting one's own personal knowledge. The mental map, thus formatted, it is not the reality but the reality of the particular individual (Nagel et al., 1985).

According to the concept of the dominant representational type we expect that learners who use in the same degree the three different mentalities may have either significantly high achievement in learning (in the case that the corresponding information presented by the three different modalities are in agreement with each other) or extremely low achievement (if the corresponding modalities transform different messages counteracting each other). That is why we call these learners the high risk group.

Research indicates that the relationship between the variables of academic achievement and academic self-concept is stronger in the high-risk group when compared with the rest of the population at primary school level (Tsiros, 2007). Research also indicates that the more similar is the educator's dominant representational type and the relevant type of his trainee's the higher is the trainee's learning efficiency (Tsiros, 2009a).

For our research we used the Dominant Representational Type Questionnaire developed by Tsiros (2009g). The instrument consists of 48 items related to the learner's preferred learning style (module). Sixteen items correspond to each of the three dominant representational types. Learners were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement, on a two point scale from agree to disagree. The Cronbach's $\alpha=0.97$ for Visual Type, $\alpha=0.97$ for Auditory Type, and $\alpha=0.96$ for Kinesthetic Type.

Self-Concept and Academic Self-concept

Global or general self-concept has been under research and clinical work all these years. Bandura (1977) criticised the use of global view of self-concept because it cannot possibly explain the wide variations typically shown in self-reactions. Earlier, Wylie (1961) had already advocated the use of more specific or molecular self-concept factors.

Recognising such a need, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) proposed a multifaceted model that considers two major areas of self-concept: academic and non-academic. Academic self-concept was divided into subject-matter areas and

then into specific areas within subjects. Similarly, no academic self-concept was divided into social and physical self-concepts, and then divided again into more specific facets. Shavelson et al. (1976) argued that the more closely self-concept is linked with specific situations, the closer the relationship between self-concept and behaviour. Thus, academic and achievement-related self-perceptions are more closely associated with learning activities and outcomes than either social or physical self-perceptions.

Bloom (1976) recognised the importance of specific academic-related self-perceptions, and argued that they have a crucial influence in motivation and perseverance in learning tasks. When learners have confidence in their academic abilities, they tend to invest more effort in completing learning tasks. On the other hand, learners who see themselves as having inadequate abilities tend to show little patience or perseverance when difficulties are encountered. Achievement outcomes, therefore, are influenced by learner's cognitive abilities, as well as by their perceptions of those abilities.

Within school self-concept there is likely to be a subset of self-perceptions. These perceptions relate to school in general, to satisfaction derived from school, to confidence in schoolwork and to beliefs about ability in specific subject areas. Following the Shavelson et al. (1976) model, it would make sense to explain school achievement self-perceptions in both general and more specific school related areas. Research indicates the contribution of the dominant representational type and the level of the self-esteem to solving teachers' burn out problems and students' learning and behavioural issues (Tsiros, 2008 ; Tsiros, 2009c,e; Tsiros & Papapetrou, 2008).

Learning Achievement

Several authors (Bloom, 1976; Brookover et al., 1965;; Marshall & Weinstein, 1984) assert that the accumulation of success and failure experiences in school contributes to the nature of each individual's school self-concept. Students whose academic histories generally reflect successful learning experiences tend to develop positive self-perceptions of ability, whereas those who experience considerable failure in learning tend to develop more negative self-perceptions of ability. Research indicates (Tsiros, 2009a) that the same happens with the adult learners.

Discussion

At the core of Neuro Linguistic Programming is the belief that, when people are engaged in activities, they are also making use of a representational system; that is, they are using some internal representation of the materials they are involved with, such as a conversation, a rifle shot, a spelling task. These representations can be visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or involve the other senses. In addition, a person may be creating a representation or recalling one. For example, a person asked to spell a word may either visualize that word printed on a piece of paper, or listen to it being sounded out, or may

construct the spelling from the application of a series of logical rules. (Druckman, 1988, p. 45).

According to NLP, for many practical purposes mental processing of events and memories can be treated as if performed by the five senses. For example, Einstein credited his discovery of special relativity to a mental visualization strategy of sitting on the end of a ray of light, and many people as part of decision-making talk to themselves in their heads (Mcgurk et al. 1976).

The manner in which this is done, and the effectiveness of the mental strategy employed is stated by NLP to play a critical role in the way mental processing takes place. This observation led to the concept of a preferred representational system, the classification of people into fixed visual, auditory or kinesthetic stereotypes. This idea was later discredited and dropped within NLP by the early 1980s, in favour of the understanding that most people use all of their senses (whether consciously or unconsciously), and that while one system may seem to dominate, this is often contextualized - globally there is a balance that dynamically varies according to circumstance and mood.

NLP asserts that for most circumstances and most people, three of the five sensory based modes seem to dominate in mental processing:

- Visual thoughts - sight, mental imagery, spatial awareness
- Auditory (or linguistic) thoughts - sound, speech, dialog, white noise.
- Kinesthetic (or proprioceptive) sense - somatic feelings in the body, temperature, pressure, and also emotion.

The other two senses, gustatory (taste) and olfactory (smell), which are closely associated, often seem to be less significant in general mental processing, and are often considered jointly as one.

NLP's interest in the senses is not so much in their role as bridges to the outside world, but in their role as internal channels for cognitive processing and interpretation. In an NLP perspective, it is not very important per se whether a person sees or hears some memory. By contrast, NLP views it as potentially of great importance for the same person, to discover that some auditory sounds presented almost out of consciousness along with the memory, may be how the brain presents to consciousness, and how consciousness knows, whether this is a heart-warming pleasant memory, or a fearsome phobic one (Tsiros, 2009b).

Representational systems are also relevant since some tasks are more optimally performed by one representational system than another. For example, within education, spelling is better learned by children who have unconsciously used a strategy of visualization, than an unconscious strategy of phonetically

sounding out. When taught to visualize, previously poor spellers can indeed improve their spelling skills. NLP proponents also found that pacing and leading the various cues tended to build rapport, and allowed people to communicate more effectively. Certain studies suggest that using similar representational systems to another person can help build rapport whilst other studies have found that merely mimicking or doing so in isolation is perceived negatively (Van Nagel et al. 1985).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were found:

- There is a relationship between dominant representational type, academic self-esteem, and learning achievement.
- Both the dominant representational type and the self-esteem can be modified through the above mentioned cognitive educational scheme.
- Evaluation of the scheme by the adult trainees indicates a positive attitude among the high majority of the participants against all criteria.
- Intense interest was shown on behalf of the participants (408 out of 2000 involved) for the application of this scheme in their future education.

These data indicate the worth of incorporating the scheme in a conversation towards the direction of redefining the quality in adult education.

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