

INTERVIEW BIRGIT BADER MIT ROBERT DILTS IN BERLIN 11.5.97

BB: There is a barrier for a lot of people to go over into a good state of learning when they become older. Do you think with NLP you have a chance to encourage people to learn?

RD: Oh, sure! I would say probably - well, you know - in one of my books - the title of one of my books is called "Dynamic Learning" and it's about not only education of young people but for adults. I think, that adult education is one of the most important factors certainly for successful societies. The reason that it is important is that these societies change. And that in the way we talk about people in a learning organisation which requires that adults learn new things all the time. you going to need a learning society which means that adults learn is as much as younger people as much as children.

I think that in a part of the reason that education has involved up to this point the way that it has is mostly focused to children who are very flexible and you can impose a lot on them. It is hard, when we begin to teach adults. We confront more and more the reality which is also in children, but reality in adults is their different learning styles, their different strategies.

One of the things that we realise is that the way that people learn is not so much through books and lectures but through actions, through dynamic activities and exercises. Things like that we do in workshops. Adult learning happens more through interactive processes in workshops. NLP has a lot to offer there because NLP is all about adult learning. I like to say that NLP actually - even the technics of NLP developed out of a workshop culture. All of NLP developed support the learning of adults. So you would go into a course of adults who are professionals and you're trying to teach them something new, teach them something relevant, something that can be put into practice, something that doesn't fit with what they already know. Personally I think that NLP seminars are a great example of a good structure for adult learning. One that allows adults to use and recognise existing unconscious competences. And then stretch those through active behaviours and interactions with others. But also with ideas - I mean it is also a learning by doing, a learning by having concepts, ideas and models. Yeah I think NLP has a lot to offer. I think that adult learning is got to be - is different than child learning, because children can tolerate a lot of things that they don't know how to apply immediately.

Most of our children learn in their first years at school where they have any immediate application for: math, spelling and all these things. But they tolerate it. But adults won't. They can't manage it. They can't tolerate that. So it needs to be relevant, interactive, paced to different learning styles and strategies.

BB: The sentence: You can if you just want it - is it fluff or does it really work?

RD: You can if you just want it - I think that if you just want it that's not enough. I think that three things that we would say in NLP that are necessary for learning and change are: to want to - to know how to - and to get the chance to.

If you don't want to than even if you know how to and are given every opportunity it doesn't matter. If you really want to but you don't know how to ... (more) you're given the opportunity you're frustrated. If you want to and know how to but don't get the

opportunity you can never put it into action. There is never a context that is you would say for support to allow you to manifest (?)

I think that adult education needs all three. You need to want to learn, to know how to learn and to get the chance to learn.

BB: Including permission?

RD: Definitely. The permission and the support. Not only the environment meaning the chance and not only the context but the chance for the point of view if both permission and support in the learning process (?).

BB: Some people are very slow in understanding in what's going on. They may have not a good memory and not enough patience and power to learn. Do you think that there is a chance to make learning charming even when there are "boaring contenses"? Gebührenordnung für Abwässer etc.

RD: Sure. But first of all: there is a sumption (?) (presupposition ?) in the question that I don't necessarily agree with. And NLP would never agree with that: that some peolpe are slow and they don't remember or whatever. What you usely find from the NLP perspective is that people have diferent styles and strategies of learning. Most lessons, learning lessons are dure towards particularly styles and strategies of learning which is generally either visual or auditory.

And if I would pretty much bed you that the ones who fall into the category "slow, difficult and impatient ones" are classicy NLP called "kinesthetic learners".

Kinesthetic learners are people who have a great memory. They just don't remember things from visual or auditory input. They remember from movement and doing and feeling.

And the same is true not even for adults but children. The kinesthetic learners are always considered the problems - you know the slow-ones - and it is because many of our systems have not evolved or been designed to support this kind of kinesthetic learning. The challenge is how to take a concept like " Gebührenordnung für Abwässer" (moving through wires) and engage somebody in that kinestheticy.

The people who desine course work, you know the instructunal designers are usually not kinestheticy learners. They are usually visual and auditory. And they don't know how to do that. So that they say: "Oh, it's difficult. We can't do that. It doesn't fit into the system."

Well, they can't do it because they are kinesthteticly learning disabled. If the kinesthetic learners were in charge they would be disabled and so I think that if you take one of the classic sort of stereotypes - you have people who are good in school and people who are good in sports - and supposoly (?) people who are good in sports might be slow in school - and yet I don't anybody who plays a sport that doesn't have an incredible memory that doesn't know to learn very complex things. They just learned it in the body.

So my answer is: of course it is possible to take something that seems abstract and turn it into somethings interesting. I think that is one of our challenges. And I think that well that this is one of the tremendous opportunities that is provided by multimedia interactice learning. Not just multimedia, because multimedia isn't necessesarily interactive. It can be just as passive. But if you have interactive multimedia tools you can animate, you can involve, you cuold take one of those

abstract ideas and bring them to life in multiple ways. I also think there are many ways to bring concepts into movement and dance. We just don't think in that way we design courses.

BB: The last question is: Do you have any other ideas for adult learning especially maybe for the teachers?

RD: Yes. First of all let's take this idea that we touched upon a little bit ago: the chance to have any permission and support. I think that one of the most important things for adults in order to learn is to have a context of sufficient safety where they can really let their own genius and wisdom out. I think one of the biggest issues with a certain adult's learning is that they know there is anxiety from their negative experiences in classrooms, they have also this anxiety from being with other people and wondering about being judged, which is called any typical learning psychological state conscious and competence.

They become conscious about what they don't know and that creates self-judgement and frustration. And what I find is that learning is so powerfully enhanced when people are in a context not that has just tools that support learning in a multimedial stuff but has a context where people can feel safe. They can feel safe to ask questions, they can feel to make mistakes. Adults are not allowed to make mistakes. How many contexts does an adult go into and is allowed to make a mistake? Not driving a car, not doing a job, not being a parent - where is an adult allowed and encouraged to make a mistake? And yet that's what is expected to children. And so adults really need a context that has that kind of safety and also not just support from the point of view of cognitive tools and support from that point of view of emotional support and encouragement that adults need much more than children do. And so I think that those are really significant factors in adult education. I would say that it is probably one of the most significant ways for adults to learn is what I would call co-modeling and cooperating learning frame works.

Adults have many unconscious competences. They know how to do a lot of things, but they haven't necessarily thought about how to do it. One of the things that NLP provides is tools for people to be able to model one another. And to realise - and I think this is one of the most important points this whole approach to learning that is to realise that there isn't not one right way to learn. It is not that you have smart people and you have stupid people. You have strategies that are ... to certain learning styles and learning capabilities and up until now we are very limited in teaching strategies. And part of what we're needing to do is to realise that not only are there different ways that people learn but each different way of learning also has its value. And I think one of the most powerful things that people can do is to realise that they can learn from others. Not just from teachers, not just from experts. In a cooperative of learning frame work adults would model how each other solves similar problems. That is something the same. And what happens there is suddenly a tremendous explosion of ideas and creativity and what we would call "learning to learn". Adults learning needs to focus as much on "learning to learn" as on learning. And "learning to learn" means: what are different strategies, what are different ways of learning, different methods, different processes - how can my being with another adult and finding out how that adult thinks about something change and enrich my way of thinking. So that I actually learn better in the result. And I think that's the kind of thing

that certainly NLP has to process and bring and needs to be done more in adult education is focussing not on just what is to learn but on how and why.

BB: Thank you, Robert.