

Neuro-Linguistic Programming as an Ethical Tool in Professional Training: A Critical Approach

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ABSTRACT

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), since its emergence in the 1970s, has evolved as an interdisciplinary approach that integrates psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience, offering practical tools to optimize communication, learning, and human development (Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

This article explores the ethical application of NLP in professional training, highlighting its potential to strengthen academic integrity, empathy, and professionalism in educational and workplace contexts. Through a critical analysis based on case studies and active methodologies, it is argued that NLP, when used responsibly, can transform educational and organizational dynamics toward more inclusive and ethical models.

Concrete pedagogical strategies are proposed, such as awareness-raising workshops and community engagement projects, to integrate NLP into the ethical training of professionals.

Keywords:

Neuro-Linguistic Programming, ethics, professionalism, academic integrity, human development, assertive communication.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, where information and communication are omnipresent, professional ethics has gained unprecedented relevance. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) emerges as a theoretical-practical framework capable of addressing these challenges by providing tools to understand and modify patterns of thought and behavior (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990).

This article explores how NLP can be integrated into professional training to promote ethical practices, based on two fundamental premises:

- **The subjectivity of perception:** The principle “The map is not the territory” (Korzybski, 1933, as cited in Bandler & Grinder, 1975) emphasizes that each individual constructs their own reality, requiring empathy and adaptability in communication.
- **Positive intention:** Every behavior, even those perceived as negative, arises from an adaptive intention (Dilts, 1990), encouraging the resolution of

conflicts through curiosity rather than judgment.

Recent studies on ethics and natural language processing suggest that, similarly to NLP, a commitment to transparency and individual autonomy is essential to prevent manipulation (Responsible Natural Language Processing, 2022) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

Professional interaction in a training context, illustrating empathetic and ethical communication in the learning process.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Framework and Background

Ethical Foundations of NLP

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is grounded in principles that go beyond the technical to address moral dimensions.

These principles are essential for the training of ethical and responsible professionals:

- **Modeling excellence:** The observation of successful behaviors (Bandler & Grinder, 1982) must be accompanied by critical reflection on the underlying values. For example, a leader who models resilience should also promote transparency and honesty within their team.
- **Personal and social ecology:** Any NLP intervention must evaluate its systemic consequences (Dilts, 1990). An illustrative case is the use of anchoring in therapy; its application without consent violates the client's autonomy (McWhirter, 2002) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

Professional interaction in a training setting, illustrating ethical dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

Practical example: In a study conducted at UNAM (2023), psychology students who applied NLP techniques with informed consent reported a 40% increase in trust within their therapeutic relationships. This finding is consistent with international research showing that NLP, when applied under supervision, improves academic performance, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking (Zhang et al., 2023).

NLP and Academic Integrity

NLP can help combat plagiarism and academic dishonesty through:

- **Self-assessment metaprograms:** Identifying whether a student prioritizes quick results (“toward”) or rigorous processes (“away from”) allows for the design of personalized pedagogical strategies (López, 2011). This personalization can help students develop greater awareness of their study habits and the importance of academic integrity.
- **Precise language:** Teaching students to write clearly reduces

ambiguities that may lead to unintentional plagiarism (Echeverría, 2003). Clarity in written communication not only improves the quality of academic work but also fosters a sense of responsibility among students.

- **Relevant data:** A pilot program at the University of Barcelona (2022) showed that NLP workshops reduced cases of plagiarism in academic work by 25%. Complementarily, studies in higher education ethics highlight that the integration of methodologies such as NLP must be accompanied by clear institutional guidelines to reinforce academic integrity (Qouzah et al., 2025).

Methodological Proposals for Ethical Integration

Five strategies validated by recent research are proposed:

1. **Experiential workshops:** Role-playing exercises in which participants practice techniques such as reframing in real ethical
2. **Analysis of controversial cases:** Discussion on the use of NLP in advertising to manipulate consumers versus empowering them. This critical analysis helps students reflect on the ethical implications of their actions.
3. **Reflective portfolios:** Critical documentation of personal applications of NLP, evaluating their ethical impact. Portfolios allow students to reflect on their learning and personal growth.
4. **Community projects:** Teaching NLP to at-risk youth to improve their communication skills without resorting to coercive persuasion. These projects not only benefit young people but also allow students to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.
5. **Supervision networks:** Interdisciplinary groups that monitor and evaluate NLP practices in educational

institutions. These networks promote collaboration and continuous learning among professionals.

Example: In a collaboration with the World Health Organization (2021), interpreters trained in NLP improved their accuracy when conveying sensitive medical information while respecting cultural contexts. Similarly, studies on virtual assistants based on language models have highlighted the importance of ethically supervising the use of automated communication tools to prevent bias and malpractice (Piñeiro-Martín et al., 2023).

NLP and Its Relevance to Professional Ethics

NLP is grounded in several principles that can be applied in professional contexts to promote ethics and professionalism. One of the most prominent principles is “*The map is not the territory*,” which suggests that each individual has their own mental representation of the world, which may differ from objective reality.

This principle is crucial in ethical practice, as it fosters empathy and understanding of

others’ perspectives. For example, in a workplace setting, a manager who applies this principle may recognize that employees interpret instructions and feedback in different ways. Rather than assuming uniform understanding, the manager can adapt communication strategies to ensure clarity, using different perceptual channels (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) to convey the message (Dilts, 1990).

Furthermore, NLP emphasizes the importance of “*positive intention*,” which holds that behind every behavior—even negative ones—there is an underlying positive intention. This approach enables professionals to address conflicts and misunderstandings from a more empathetic perspective, facilitating problem-solving and the development of stronger relationships. For instance, a teacher facing resistance from a student may reflect on the intention behind that resistance, seeking to understand the student’s concerns instead of reacting defensively (O’Connor & Seymour, 1990).

Academic Integrity and Responsible Use of NLP

Academic integrity is a fundamental principle that should guide educational practice. NLP, by offering tools to improve communication and understanding, can be used to foster a learning environment in which integrity and transparency are prioritized. However, it is crucial that educators and students use these tools ethically, avoiding manipulation or distortion of reality that could undermine trust in the educational process.

The responsible use of NLP implies that professionals must be aware of how their words and actions can influence others. For example, when using anchoring techniques—which associate a positive emotional state with a specific stimulus—it is essential that these are applied ethically and with the consent of the other person.

This not only respects individual autonomy but also promotes an environment of trust and mutual respect (McWhirter, 2002). A practical example would be a therapist who uses anchoring to help a client access a positive emotional state during a session. If the therapist applies this technique without the client's

consent or without prior discussion of its use, it may generate distrust and negatively affect the therapeutic relationship.

Therefore, it is essential that NLP professionals act with transparency and honesty in their practice (see Figure 3).



Figure 3

Representation of a therapeutic intervention in which the use of anchoring without consent may affect trust and the professional relationship.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

Methodological Proposals for the Ethical Integration of NLP

A methodological approach is proposed to integrate NLP into the ethical training of professionals. This approach includes:

- **Awareness-raising workshops:** Practical sessions in which participants can experience NLP

techniques and reflect on their ethical application. These workshops may include self-assessment exercises and reflection on how participants use NLP in their daily lives and professional practice. For example, group dynamics can be implemented in which participants practice assertive language and reflect on how this type of communication impacts their interpersonal relationships.

- **Case studies:** Analysis of real situations in which NLP has been used ethically or unethically, promoting discussion and critical learning. These case studies may include examples of NLP applications in educational, therapeutic, and business contexts, highlighting both benefits and associated risks. For instance, a case could examine how an educator used NLP techniques to improve student motivation, contrasted with a case in which these techniques were misused to manipulate students.

- **Reflective assessments:** Self-evaluation tools that allow students to identify their own patterns of thought and behavior in relation to professional ethics. These assessments may include questionnaires and reflective exercises that help participants recognize their biases and areas for improvement. For example, a reflective journal could be implemented in which students record their experiences applying NLP in both ethical and unethical situations.
- **Community engagement projects:** Initiatives that use NLP to address social and community issues, promoting social commitment and ethical responsibility. These projects may include NLP workshops in underserved communities, where communication and conflict-resolution skills are taught. For example, a project could involve NLP students working with at-risk youth, teaching them assertive communication and emotional management techniques.

- **Creation of support networks:**

Establishment of discussion and support groups among professionals who use NLP, fostering a space to share experiences and reflect on ethical practice. These networks can facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaboration on joint projects. For example, an online forum could be created where NLP professionals share experiences and discuss ethical dilemmas encountered in their practice.

NLP in the Context of Ethics and Professionalism

NLP is not limited to improving communication; it can also serve as a powerful tool for personal and professional development. By applying NLP principles, professionals can enhance their self-awareness and their ability to manage emotions, which is essential for acting ethically in challenging situations. For example, the technique of reframing—changing the perception of a situation by assigning it a new meaning—can be used to transform negative experiences into learning opportunities.

This not only promotes personal growth but can also positively influence organizational culture and interpersonal relationships. A leader who uses reframing to address a project failure can inspire their team to view mistakes as opportunities for learning and improvement, rather than as causes for discouragement (Bandler & Grinder, 1982).

Ethics in the Training of Interpreters and Communication Professionals

Ethics in the training of interpreters and other communication professionals is a crucial aspect that must be addressed within the NLP framework. NLP can be used to teach interpreters to become more aware of their own perceptions and biases, enabling them to communicate more effectively and ethically with their clients.

Furthermore, NLP can help interpreters develop empathy and cultural understanding, which are essential in a globalized world. By understanding how cultural differences influence communication, interpreters can act with greater sensitivity and respect toward the diverse perspectives of their clients. For example, an interpreter who applies NLP

techniques may adapt their interpreting style to better reflect the emotions and cultural nuances of the original speaker, thereby improving the overall quality of communication (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990).

CONCLUSIONS

Neuro-Linguistic Programming offers a valuable set of tools that can be used to promote ethics and professionalism in academic training. By integrating NLP into the educational curriculum, it is possible to foster a more inclusive and responsible learning environment in which academic integrity and the ethical use of technology are prioritized.

The implementation of methodological proposals that integrate NLP into the ethical training of professionals can generate a significant shift in how ethics is approached in education and professional practice. By encouraging critical reflection and social commitment, NLP can become a powerful tool for the development of ethical and responsible professionals.

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