

Jaap Hollander Ph.D.

NLP and Science

Six recommendations for a better relationship

The wisdom of science

In the late nineteenth century a man named Thomas Edison proposed a new system whereby, so he claimed, light could be produced by using electricity. Around the same time a certain Bell wanted to set up a wild thing he called a telephone line. Fortunately, the general public was warned against them by academic experts who, at an early stage, were on to the glaring scientific invalidity of these novelties. Edison and Bell were quickly exposed as swindlers whose ideas could not pass the test of scientific scrutiny. Erasmus Wilson, a professor at the University of Oxford, wrote at the time: 'When the World Exhibition in Paris is over, light by electricity will also be finished and will never be heard of by anyone again.' A British parliamentary committee which had been formed to examine Edison's light bulb agreed whole-heartedly with the professor. In 1878 they arrived at the following conclusion: 'Edison's ideas do not deserve the attention of people who think in scientific and practical terms.' Just like the light bulb, the telephone was quickly unmasked to show its ramshackle scientific underpinnings. In 1863 a certain Joshua Coopersmith was arrested as a confidence trickster, on charges of fraud, when he tried to raise money to set up a telephone system. The science journalist of the *Boston Post* wrote: 'Well-informed individuals know that it is impossible to have the human voice transmitted through a wire, and that such an invention, if it were feasible, would be of no practical value at all.'

Academic fraud

In Holland, where I live, scientists have repeatedly, over the last ten years, run down NLP in the media. It is likely that you will have the same experience in your country. For example, a Dutch professor of psychology called Drenth once slated NLP on national television during