



Constructive Interventionist

*Newsletter of the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at the School of Psychology,
University of Hertfordshire*

No. 37, August 2008

Editor's Comments

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Dear Reader,

You are likely to be taken aback by the change of lay-out in this issue of the *Constructive Interventionist*. That has come about because we have welcomed into the Editorial team, Steve Trenoweth as Managing Editor. He is bringing this newsletter into the modern world, one thing being it will now come to you as a PDF file. Steve introduces himself under 'People News'.

There is a theme that has been picked up from the last issue of this newsletter and that is about the relationship between personal construct psychology and constructivism. Fay cannot remember exactly how many years ago, certainly more than ten, that she first brought up her concern about personal construct psychology being buried without trace under the label 'constructivism'. That concern was never about constructivism itself. After all it was Kelly who first brought it out of the

philosophical cupboard. But it was about people using Kelly's ideas under the name of constructivism without mentioning where the ideas came from. As any advertiser knows, if you do not talk about a product it dies a natural death because new people do not know it exists. As you can see from Dennis Bury's second piece on this issue, the problem has not gone away.

We are continually trying to move PCP into new areas and to see how it relates to other theories and practices. The last workshop led by Finn Tschudi and the forthcoming one to be led by Dusan Stojnov, which are both reported on here, are examples of this. So is the piece by Trevor Butt showing how the method of *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* and PCP methods relate or do not relate to each other.



People News

I would like to introduce myself. I am Dr Steve Trenoweth and I am delighted to say that I will be helping out Fay and Nick with producing this newsletter. I am a qualified Mental Health Nurse with a background in Psychology and am currently working as a Senior Lecturer in Psychological Sciences at Thames Valley University.

I have recently completed my PhD using the PCP research approach to understand the adventures of student mental health nurses as they make their way towards qualification.

After 5 years I find myself even more drawn to constructivism than at the start! Indeed, many colleagues and clinicians across a variety of healthcare professions have approached me, knowing my interest, to explore the use of PCP in their own practice. It seems that there are many who see the potential in PCP in their own researches and adventures.

In my own small way, by supporting the production of this newsletter, I am very happy to encourage this process.

Conferences

The 2009 International Congress on PCP

As we told you in the last Issue, the next Congress will be held on the island of San Servolo in the lagoon of Venice. The dates are July 20 to 24 2009. Details of San Servolo can be found on the website:

<http://tinyurl.com/4qmopb>

To date we have no further information.

The Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire

The Centre continues to offer a Distance Learning Programme on “PCP and its Methods of Inquiry”. A special version of this has recently been launched for Researchers.

The aim of both courses is to give students a solid foundation in personal construct theory and several personal construct methods of inquiry including: triadic elicitation, laddering and pyramiding of constructs; ratings repertory grids and self-

characterisations. The tutors on the courses are Fay Fransella and Nick Reed.

Starting dates: entry any time subject to place availability.

Course fee: £650.

Full details can be downloaded from the University’s website: www.health.herts.ac.uk/cpd/cpcp

Any Comments or Contributions?

Please let us know if you have any comments to make on what you read here or have ideas about what we might put in a forthcoming issue of the newsletter do, please, email Nick or Fay:

Nick Reed: nick@grid-pcp.co.uk

Fay Fransella: ffransella@lambslane.eclipse.co.uk



The European PCP Association Bi-Annual Conference took place in June of this year at Queen Mary College, University of London, Mile End in London. There will doubtless be many reports of the event which was teeming with younger people and students. There didn't seem to be many of the younger elements there from the UK but that's perhaps a bit incorrect but it seemed like that and if so, questions could be asked about our system. As I saw it, all tastes were represented ranging from Grid Technology [including one which reproduced a project testing technique rather like the Rorschach Test (you know – the “ink blot test” only this one used a range of pictures to choose from)] to PCP activity in business settings to philosophical dimensions. I expect much of this will be captured by publication in due course.

I wish to focus on Professor David Winter's presentation. He was concerned that the forthcoming expansion in the governmentally inspired psychological care, “Improving Access to Psychological Therapy” or IAPT for short, will leave no room for PCP [or other alternative therapies for that matter].

Professor Winter expressed the view that in coming to a rather narrow selection of therapies (or just one to be precise), the process of the design of the IAPT had made certain assumptions. He went on to elaborate some of the problems which had been raised by these. For example, research indicating recovery from mental illness using therapies other than Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) has been excluded from consideration. He also had sharp reservations about design bias, selection of participants and allegiance of researchers in the research. All in all, the trend, he commented, was towards a selective attention to CBT as the only therapy of value. This reflected a current concern with the ‘right therapy’ as opposed to a range of alternatives including the ‘right process’. Additionally, he was able to highlight a need for more complexity in the research, for example it might be important to include interactional effects

between the outlook of the patient/client and that of the therapist. There was also the question of longitudinal gain which he thought didn't achieve the attention which it should. He also raised the question of whether pathologising classifications such as were implied in the DSM-IV TR system confined the matter still further. His recommendations were therefore towards not “What works for whom?” but “What else works for whom?”. Choice, he quoted from a 2007 publication, was confined to CBT – Computer based, Group or Individual!

Readers of the Constructive Interventionist would tend to think an alternativistic account as potentially the best one to pursue. In effect, perhaps we should be interested in those facilities which have a transdiagnostic character, making it possible thereby to identify universal helping procedures and yet also at the same time identify specific treatment responses applying to particular conditions.

Overall, there was an interesting section in the presentation where Professor Winter was able to spell out a potential “evidence base” that we now have for PCP efficacy. He negotiated this stance with the awareness that one needs to avoid restricting therapeutic choice to an extent which excludes (evidence based) findings about matching patients' needs.

This area will become very salient over the next few years as the Governmental initiatives are implemented and the outcomes of the scheme can be researched in an empirical way (evidence based!); perhaps only then will the wider meaning of ‘evidence base’ be revealed. Perhaps it is an ill wind just now but may serve to promote wider access in the long run. Professor Winter wasn't too sure about this optimistic possibility

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You might wonder at first what personal construct psychology was doing in the Restorative Justice world. This was the subject of a day long presentation by Professor Finn Tschudi at the University of Hertfordshire on Restorative Justice under the auspices of the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology. We'll say a bit about the proceedings and then maybe the connection might become clearer.

It was a surprisingly rich day with a lot of material. It was very helpful to have the definition and examples of Restorative Justice. There was even a film of a Restorative Justice 'ceremony' being worked through. That film described in graphic detail a community in a state of civil war, with one side having committed acts of murder and great brutality on the other. We were all extremely moved by the experience of watching this film, which lasted for about an hour. The film allowed us to experience the roller-coaster of emotions that are likely to emerge in a situation where horrific violence has been exacted on innocent people. Punishment of those guilty of these terrible crimes was the first thought that probably entered most of our minds and comparisons with our own largely Retributive Justice system, to the fore. It seemed quite impossible that the victims or the relatives of those murdered would be able to reconstrue. Yet reconstrue they did and through a process of ritual and the consequent outpourings of emotion, a constructive alternative was reached for everyone. Through this process of Kellyian aggression by all concerned a sense of community was restored and a group regained its commonality of construing.

Perhaps less 'satisfying' was the case of the violent burglar who had a Restorative Justice 'conference' with his victim. Apparently, both reconstrued and the victim and the burglar are now actually friends. Restorative Justice conferences are voluntary - a victim doesn't have to agree to meet the offender, so if the victim feels better after the experience, then that must be a good thing. However, whether Restorative Justice procedures will act as a sufficient deterrent to criminals is perhaps open to doubt and perhaps there will always be a role for punishment, even where victims consent to being involved in a

conference with the offender. You can read the case study that was presented in the workshop at: <http://tinyurl.com/5ek69g>

As the case study also contains a general introduction to the Restorative Justice process, it is worth a visit if you are interested in knowing a bit more about that.

There were some less explicit assumptions in the workshop as well. These might have been such things as - 'Retributive Justice doesn't seem to work that well or maybe there is feminine aspect of Restorative Justice or that Restorative Justice involved people's Core Constructs in its processes whereas others may not touch the person.

All in all, with this encounter there were all sorts of casual surprises popping up - you know, things that you think you know but just don't know how to say them until somebody else does! For example, isn't there a universality about shame. Haven't we all got some point where we can be shamed/where a core construct for ourselves is in some measure invalidated? Another point we valued was that we spend so much time on the differences and deficits between things that we were inclined to lose that very Kellyian notion of what the similarities might be - an important thing to have in mind when sociality has become shattered by a bad act.

All the way through the workshop, Professor Tschudi showed us by implication, not directly, that PCP is a useful perspective to have in the field of Restorative Justice. A Constructive Interventionist doesn't have to have the normalising perspective which the Retributive model possesses. In common with a multi modal perspective, the PCP practitioner will find themselves not bound in any one modality. Not everything in life is solved through words and thoughts. Sometimes rituals and ceremonies can be powerful accessories to core value change and those settings are where the Restorative Justice happens. Finally, the Constructive Interventionist has a proportionate understanding of the role of sociality and communality in bringing about individual change - you can't have too much of a Restorative Justice action without community involvement either.

Since the day of the workshop, there have been many thoughts about it and impressions which have crossed our mind. It must have touched something a bit more core than we realized.



Courses and Workshops: 'Spying on the Self'

No. 37, August 2008

The details of the next workshop that the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire is running are:

'Spying on the Self'

A workshop to be led by

Professor Dusan Stojnov

Wednesday, 26th November 2008

10.00 – 17.00

The 'self' has been the subject of many controversies in psychology - from being a core issue at the onset of psychology as a discipline, to being ruthlessly banned by behaviourists and then again becoming a central concern of psychology.

Throughout almost all of this time, the self was treated as an entity residing "under the skin" - as being a private property of an individual. The constructivist approach to psychology has boldly challenged this approach and offers an alternative construction of self, suggesting that the self is 'created' by the individual and that there can be not one but many selves, which are not totally integrated but fragmented. From this point of view, the self is not a structure but a process.

Leading constructivists and constructionists such as Rom Harré, John Shotter, Kenneth Gergen, Michel Foucault and many others, have enabled not only different approaches and conceptualizations of the self, but also many different ways of working with the self. Unfortunately, this work

has unfairly neglected the pioneering contribution of George Kelly and his Personal Construct Psychology towards the study of the self.

"Spying on the Self" is a workshop designed to investigate the self in the context of social forces through the application of Personal Construct Psychology, with the aim of fostering better understanding of people and their construing processes. It includes outlines of different approaches to the self in psychology and psychotherapy and a special technique of elaboration of the self using Conceptual Mapping, a method developed by Ausubel, Novak and Govin, which allows an analysis of a person's different selves in different social contexts. The question of desirability and inevitability of a 'real' self will be considered, together with the introduction of the ideas of Community of Self (Miller Mair) Protean Self and Presentation of the Self.

This experiential workshop will be of interest to all those who are concerned with theoretical approaches to the self and to those who are interested in learning about new methods of working with the self in the areas of psychotherapy, educational psychology and human resources. No previous knowledge of Personal Construct Psychology is needed to attend this workshop.

Dusan Stojnov is a Professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade and he is President of the Serbian Constructivist Association

<http://www.ukons.org.rs>

**Wednesday,
26th November
2008**

10.00 – 17.00

Cost: £65

Venue:

**University of
Hertfordshire,
Hatfield**

**For
application
forms please
visit:**

www.health.herts.ac.uk/cpd/cpcp

**Enquiries:
n.b.reed@herts.ac.uk**



LET'S TALK: Using Personal Construct Psychology to Support Children and Young People

By Simon Burnham

A Lucky Duck Book London: Sage 2008

Commented on by Fay Fransella

This is a very unusual book both in style and presentation. Simon Burnham talks to us, as readers. He says he is borrowing the style used in Burr and Butt's (1992) book. Burnham emphasises that the book is not about therapy or counselling but sees personal construct psychology as very relevant to all our lives all the time. A view that many of us hold.

Everything Simon covers is in conversational style and supported by many many excellent examples. This is definitely a book about working with children but much could well be modified to be used with adults.

He is keen on the 'person as scientist' view of the child. For example, a young child screams when denied a biscuit. Screaming is the child's experiment testing the prediction "If I scream I will get a biscuit". The child's prediction may be validated or invalidated. The whole book uses this idea of prediction and control.

A considerable amount of personal construct theory is covered, nearly all with very nice examples. Great use is made of personal reflexivity and the author asks the reader to carry out an exercise picturing one's personal best-case and worst-case scenarios. All very enjoyable and so many illuminating ideas.

One surprise is that, for Simon, 'ladders' go down and 'pyramids' go up. I just have to reconstrue. Suddenly all my values are down in the dungeons while those small things in my life are up in the heavens. For Simon, laddering involved him "climbing down into ever more fundamental parts of a person's construct system" and he elicits "rock bottom" stuff. Now my superordinate

constructs are down there.

Simon states that there are no 'grids' in his book. In the author's view they get too far away from 'natural conversation'. Those familiar with Tom Ravenette's work will know that he, too, would never mention grids in descriptions of his work – although it is fair to say that some of his techniques do look rather like grids.

My concerns are few but, to me, one is important. He describes what he calls 'George Kelly's three 'big ideas''. These are 'constructs', 'constructive alternativism' and the 'centrality in our lives of prediction and control'. He deals very well with the second and third in his list but I am not happy about his construing of 'the construct'. For Simon there is "the existence in our heads, in our thinking, of things called constructs" (p. 6). At that point I turned to the back of the book to find the Index to look up 'constructs' – but there is no Index. I could find no mention anywhere of non-verbal constructs. What I am not happy about is that there is no clear statement that both children and adults have ways of construing the world that do not have verbal labels attached to them. After all, none of us had verbal labels when we first faced life. The idea of non-verbal constructs may well be implied in this book but a new-comer to PCP would get the idea that constructs are, as he puts it, "an either/or verbal tool that helps us to make sense of the world".

Attached to the book is something of great value. It includes a CD at the back. Unfortunately my CD was broken. But the last chapter of the book is about the contents of the CD Rom entitled 'Let's Talk'. He describes how he came to use his computer with children and young people, especially those who will not talk or disclose any personal information. The use of the computer for communication is not 'instead of' face-to-face communication but can supplement it. The CD contains slides which may bring up pictures and a prompt asking a question. There are 15 specific questions in all. I have not seen the CD working but the book contains pictures of each slide.

In fact, everything in this little book is easy to read and understand and I would recommend anyone working with children to read it and also those who work with adults who have communication problems.



Phenomenology and PCP

In contemporary social psychology, there is now a general recognition that qualitative methods are necessary in answering many research questions. There is a huge growth of interest in these methods, and the British Psychological Society's fastest growing section is one devoted to this area. Most of these methods are phenomenological: they aim to investigate the way the world appears to people (the 'lifeworld'). But of course, constructivist methods have also always focused on individuals' constructions of meaning. And it seems to me that they are just as good, and sometimes better at it. Yet they are not nearly as well known to the general psychological research community.

Phenomenological methods

Phenomenological methods can be thought of as ranged along a continuum from descriptive to interpretive (see Langdridge, 2007). At the so-called descriptive end, a person is interviewed about a particular experience, say, that of mistrust. They might be asked in advance to think about a particular instance of it and consider it in detail before the interview. This interview is then taped, transcribed and then broken down into 'meaning units'. These stay as close to the text as possible, but are then slowly assembled into larger units in which the researcher tries to preserve the subject's meaning in an attempt to capture the essence of the experience. Several subjects are normally interviewed in an attempt to get as wide a grasp as possible on the structure of the phenomenon. At the other end of the spectrum, the interpretive pole, a similar semi-structured interview is used. There is an analysis of the client's account into themes, requiring some form of interpretation. In the health field in

particular, many researchers seem to rely exclusively on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). It is an excellent method, but it is one of many interpretive strategies that can be used. Others are Template Analysis and Critical Narrative Analysis.

IPA is essentially a form of thematic analysis:

1. a semi structured interview, lasting about an hour, in which the subject focuses on the experience in question. This is taped and transcribed (can take up to 6 hours).
2. The researcher reads and re-reads the interview, making comments in the margin
3. These are then organized into themes in the other margin.
4. These are then listed and further organized so steps 2-4 are a move from subordinate to superordinate themes as seen by the researcher.
5. A number of subjects may be interviewed, possibly 6 or more, and common themes sought.

PCP methods

One difference between PCP and other methods is that we start off with the assumption that the lifeworld is characterized best in terms of bi-polar personal constructs. For most phenomenologists, this is an unwarranted assumption. Some advantages of a PCP method are that it takes less time, with perhaps no taping and transcribing. And any themeing going from sub to superordinate is carried out in laddering with the subject's participation - it isn't just the work of the researcher. And I would say we still get to the world as it is perceived and constructed by the subject/client.

Editors' Comments

The Editors invited Trevor Butt to make it clear why anyone should chose to use personal construct theory and its methods instead of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. To us the answer seemed obvious but clearly it is not so to everyone. You will know from what Dennis Bury has written above that Trevor has had a book recently published on *George Kelly: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Anyone interested in some of the philosophical influences on Kelly's thinking would be well advised to dip into this very easy-to-read account. It will also be reported on in the December issue of this newsletter.



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and PCP Methods by Trevor Butt (cont)

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Chiari, G. & Laura Nuzzo, M. (1996) Psychological constructivisms: a metatheoretical differentiation. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 9, 163-184.

Fransella, F. (Ed.) (2003) *International Handbook in Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester: Wiley

Langdridge, D. (2007) *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory research and method*. Harlow :Pearson

Warren, W. (1998) *Philosophical Dimensions of Personal Construct Psychology*. London: Routledge

Most importantly, in my view, PCP methods help the person to articulate what they mean. I've found that people can't always express themselves in a semi-structured interview. Yet a focus on how two events are the same and different from another— say why two are exciting and the other isn't - can help people to reach for what the essence of what excitement is for them. Of course, PCP has developed many techniques of this type (see, for example, the chapters by Denicolo, Fransella and Salmon in the *International Handbook*). And Kelly's description of the analysis of self-characterization sketches (1955, Volume 1, pp. 319-359) is a really beautiful example of phenomenological practice.

One other point: of course any type of interview is a skilled procedure. I've seen some undergrad student projects using IPA that are rather weak because the researcher doesn't have enough

skill at framing the interview questions; they imagine that the perspective of the subject will just emerge. But it's an excellent method used properly by a skilled person, who has experience in helping people express themselves. One might argue that the interviewer needs even more skill with a PCP interview in that they certainly have to be familiar with the theory.

Are PCP methods phenomenological?

I think phenomenological methods are best thought of as having an extended family relationship. They are loosely and generally related to each other – they are interested in the individual's point of view. So in my view, personal construct methods are members of this family (Butt, 2004, 2008). This is a view shared by Warren (1998) and Chiari and Nuzzo (1996). When we frame our methods in this way, I hope that there is more chance that researchers will encounter them and be able to draw on and develop them.

Advance Notice

The Residential Conference of the Personal Construct Psychology Association, 'Creation and Creations', has had to be postponed until next year. The plans will include a number of innovative schemes including a consulting net, a library of PCP books, artistic and literary representations, Grid activity and a Fettschrift

Details of the reassigned event can be had from Dennis Bury (dennisbury@googlemail.com) or Allan Thomson (alanthomson34@googlemail.com)



Constructivism Represented or Not Dennis Bury

In the Spring Edition this year of the “Psychotherapist” – the UK Journal of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) – there appeared three articles on the topic of Constructivism. In the April issue of this Newsletter, we gave an account of this, essentially making some points regarding ways in which the articles didn’t do justice to what would be a sound understanding of PCP. In fact the aftermath of the Summer edition of the “Psychotherapist” was that calls went out to PCP Registrants of the UKCP suggesting that they reply to the articles. But none did so. Instead a reply has been provided by the very experienced and esteemed Humanistic Psychotherapist, John Rowan.

He makes the point that the authors, in his view, “wouldn’t know Constructivism if it came up and bit them in the street”. He then showed how the authors had depended on Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) entirely for their writings and their principles. He did this by outlining in a very erudite way the tenets of various forms of, mainly, wait for it Social Constructivism – Gergen, *discourse*, *power* and *realism*. All good stuff but one missed the Constructive [as opposed to Constructivist] side of intervention.

This newsletter, being the *Constructive Interventionist*, is more likely to consider that the role of the PCP practitioner, in whatever setting, is to find out about the construing of the person or group and to pay good regard for the coherence of the system of such construing. They would then be most likely to take responsibility on behalf of with the client/patient to act in accordance with the needs of such a system and process of construing. This might involve not leaping in with the

production of change; it might mean doing things by small steps; it might mean reducing threat. Overall, it might mean confining the work to simply getting the person’s construing system moving but not attending too much to a finished product. This personal (or even, one might say, personalised) constructivism will, of course, go down like a ton of bricks. The humanist therapists won’t like it because such a stance takes away responsibility from the person to engineer themselves, the NLP therapists won’t like it much because it will stand in the way of the production of ever more creative techniques and countless others will find it difficult.

We are likely in the near future to find the therapy worlds constrained by the Governmental bodies to three main thrusts which will define where particular therapies belong – the cognitive behavioural, the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic and the humanistic. The particular concern that constructive intervention seeks (inter alia) is the care of a person’s system of personal construing. I wonder where this is likely to be best represented? I think it’s time we did some writing for various publics but I am thinking that it’s hard to do this because the particular message which constructive intervention has fits into all three of those main classifications and in an era when there is a narrowing of the perspectives [even the British Psychological Society has dropped its requirement that students for the Chartered status – Clinical etc. have to have three main theoretical bases]!! We’d better do something now though or, to quote again someone who has said it before (Prof Fay Fransella), we’ll “disappear without trace”.

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