



The Constructive Interventionist

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

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

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Dear reader,

This edition of the newsletter comes to you later than planned to allow for the inclusion of a report on the recent EPCA conference that took place in Dublin. We have also changed our schedule and now there will only be two editions of the newsletter per year, to allow greater time to gather contributions.

This edition contains two interesting pieces by our regular contributor Dennis Bury, a report by Helen Jones on the above mentioned European Personal Construct Association conference and some reflections on emigrating from South Africa to New Zealand by Willfred Greyling.

I also attended the EPCA

conference in Dublin and I was amazed at the large number of delegates who attended. In particular, I was very impressed that so many Italian PCP people had made the journey across Europe to be there. The Centre for Personal Construct Psychology presented a proposal that the 2015 PCP International Congress be held at the University of Hertfordshire and I will circulate more about that in due course.

I would like to thank all of our contributors and remind readers that we can only produce a newsletter if we have something to put in it, so do please send in your contributions!

Nick Reed

Reflections on Emigrating

by Willfred Greyling

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Escape from hyper-vigilance

When I reflect on the adventure called emigrating, I invariably want to re-visit the constructs that prompted the act. In our case, we could no longer bear the physical and psychological effects of a hyper-vigilant and survival-driven South African lifestyle. As I write these words, I remember the security measures we had in place to keep us safely imprisoned in our home. I remember the mayhem and brutality of life in the country, these horrific acts radically changing the lives of family and friends. At the time, my wife and I used laddering to explore “hyper-vigilance” and “survival” as typical of our lifestyle. As responsible citizens, we are required to be vigilant in dealing with the events of our lives: in our case, the preferred pole of an appropriate, not necessarily stressful, responsiveness to our environment had been replaced by an extreme – in my view, almost pathological – sustained scanning of a range of everyday contexts for potential threats and risks. The price on the tag had become too high: we had no qualms about leaving behind our lives we had created over approximately 25 years of growing up, working and living in the country. I held a senior academic position as an applied linguist and head of English at a university, while my wife worked as a departmental head at a high school. When both of us found that our experiences had taken us beyond the thresholds of what was meaningful to endure, we left.

By contrast, New Zealand is relatively safe; yet, one has to know the turf. In the fourth year of this adventure, I continue to marvel at the privilege of going on a 50-minute jog down

to the Waikato River – I often wonder whether Kiwis appreciate the miracle of free movement, a safe environment and a relaxed mode of being. I am reminded of Don Bannister’s observation that a construct slot change from one pole to another is much easier than a shift change in one’s construct network. To us, this part of emigrating has been an easy slot change.

On tentativeness and decisive action

Of course, one does not change one’s constructs as one would a motherboard on a computer. After arriving in 2009, I had a sense of suspending – even mistrusting - my judgement in engaging Kiwis. Perhaps it was the fear of misinterpreting my experience, arriving at the wrong conclusions, offending the locals, or making a fool of myself. One’s experience becomes ambiguous and less predictable, which, in turn, leads to a sense of reduced control, followed by ambivalence and anxiety. As one becomes more socialised, one’s experiences and responses shift from a tentative and politely exploratory mode to a more decisive, spontaneous and even politely challenging style (at least for me). My wife and I have learnt, I believe, to live with these zones of uncertainty and evolving meaning - and be amused by novel events in our experiences.

Celebrating one’s adoptive country

There is much to celebrate in New Zealand. There are numerous examples of how communities have responded to significant crises:

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the Christchurch earthquakes, the Pike River mine disaster, the grounding of the Rena off the East Coast, and the recent Carterton hot air balloon tragedy. The common denominator: it is all about people, as the Māori proverb states:

He aha te mea nui o te ao? (What is the most important thing in the world?)

He tangata! He tangata! He tangata! (It is people! It is people! It is people!)

I am surprised by how tolerant New Zealanders are of the many voices from various cultures in the country. A Māori saying captures the idea with its reference to the sounds made by different birds in the forest:

E koekoe te tūī, e ketekete te kākā, e kūkū te kereru (The tūī chatters, the parrot gabbles, the wood pigeon coos)

Facing the challenges

These ingrained values of respect for people and diversity fill me with hope for the future. When the New Zealand prime minister's office publishes a report on an emerging underclass and increased poverty in the country; or when the New Zealand Institute highlights the challenges of teenage pregnancy, single-parent families, teenage mortality, suicide among Māori boys, the methamphetamine scourge, alcohol abuse and obesity, I know these values will be tested. It is among these realities that I find the meaningfulness of my current employment as a

literacy-embedding manager in the tertiary sector.

To end off: the Treaty of Waitangi, entered into by the Crown and Māori chiefs, in 1840, created an enduring framework for restorative justice. The South African equivalent was established more than 150 years later for a limited time-span: Bishop Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The treaty, I believe, has served as a unifying discursive object, allowing generations of Māori and pākeha (Europeans) to maintain a culture of debate and engagement, however conflictual.

What - or who - do we miss?

Unlike my wife, I do not miss South Africa. But we both miss our children and our extended families who chose to remain. Although Skype, e-mail and texts are great technological innovations, they cannot replace a hug or a face-to-face exchange.

Would we do it again?

My answer is an unequivocal yes. There is so much to explore and discover, not least of all our own psychological landscapes which, under the scrutiny of a relaxed inner eye, again seem to be waiting to be explored.

Willfred Greyling

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Reference:

<http://www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/proverbs.html>



PCP Courses

The Centre for Personal Construct Psychology offers distance learning courses in PCP and its methods. There are 2 versions of the course - the “Standard” version and the “Specialised Version for Researchers”

Full details of the Centre’s courses can be downloaded at:

<http://www.psy.herts.ac.uk/cpcp/courses.html>

Our courses can be started at any time of the year.

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Observation Oriented Modelling

by James Grice

An appraisal by Dennis Bury

To personal construct psychologists, the name of the author of this volume, James Grice, will be well known - not least, for the creation and on-going development of his software program for analysing repertory grids: Idiogrid. This volume is a further foray into the realm of statistics and how people are studied. It is a radical excursion where Fisherian traditional statistical methods are provided with a robust alternative.

There are two functional issues which underlie the book:

(1) That what you and I have been taught about analysing data has often been based upon statistics which turn everything into averages and which relies upon a smooth distribution of the data to do that successfully. To quote our author:

“The researcher...is ready to focus not on aggregate statistics but instead on patterns that explain individual observations” (p.135)

(2) That the use of ratings along a continuum belongs to the branch of science where the materials involved mean one can be more certain of a constant spread. In the human sciences particularly, by assigning all to the belief in the smooth outlay of the data, one is in danger of ignoring individual variation.

The answer to both these problems is to retain what the author calls the ‘deep structure’ of data. Here’s an example of how we should set out our scores:

	Male	Female
Participant 1	0	1
Participant 2	0	1
Participant 3	1	0
Participant 4	1	0
Participant 5	0	1
Participant 6	0	1

Now if you haven’t run a mile because you have seen figures, you will have realised that this is a way of saying we’re all chaps here and some of us are men. What can done with this is that these templates can be rotated to secure a fit - much larger and complex than this example. James Grice is particularly keen to place the Procrustean rotation before us as a suitable example (it is one that occurs in Idiogrid). This process avoids

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Observation Oriented Modelling

by James Grice

An appraisal by Dennis Bury (cont'd)

turning all the data into differences from the Mean. Now, the reader has probably given up at this point. However, there is no reason to do so because all the handling of this data can be accomplished using software available on the internet and each step is explained well.

At this point the reader is wondering what can be achieved with the manoeuvres. Well, for one thing, don't we sometimes worry when someone says our data isn't linear enough and we have to throw out the 'Outliers'; those Outliers are people and, from a constructivist perspective, they tell a story too. The author then goes on to show that if old experimental data from the annals of psychology are re-calculated, new findings emerge which Means Aggregated statistics obscured.

At every point, the book re-works things and the reader has picture of the history of statistics and how wrong turnings have been made. Effect Sizes, Correlations, Sampling, Significance – all bite the dust as inefficient translators of data. Traditional experiments are re-examined – Darwin and Mendel become vindicated whilst Darley and Latane (Bystander Apathy) and Zimbardo (you know what) become re-assessed; this is to name but a few.

One is reminded regularly that statistics aren't just about jobs for the boys but are, in fact, an essential aspect of philosophy, tapping into the question of how things are. The author works from Aristotle's outline of four levels of causality with the accusation that aggregate statistics are operative at only one level of Aristotle's four propositions about causality.

Putting cause back into the equation is James Grice's intention and it is what marks this book out as distinctively different from the average 'primer' to add to the mile-high pile which exist in print and also on the net to make the subject intelligible to the commoner. It is a book about where psychological science has gone astray. Is it just a rant? Far from it. Each step is evidenced by quotation from the various contrary voices strewn about in the history of statistics. The one I like is where Cohen and his Effect size approximation is brought to its knees by progressive denunciation and terminated by a pronouncement of "ritual" (the implication being that it is empty of meaning). Another delight is the attack on Latent Variables, as in the Structural Equation Modelling debate. It gets a bit stormy for a reader – here's a quote:

This picture can be made even fuzzier if latent variables are considered as random variables. The reason for the increased confusion is that a random variable is not a variable per se; rather, it is a function connecting a domain to a range", (p.179).

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Observation Oriented Modelling

by James Grice

An appraisal by Dennis Bury (cont'd)

The book is full of incisive commentary which goes into the small print of statistics as most of us have known it. The work is so erudite with massive evidence in support of the various contentions that it's something that has to be read and re-read – no escaping that, sorry. I do hope it wins its battle, for it is a polemic treatise, not only as revenge for years of un-thoughtful cook-book statistics, but the herald of an alternative vision. Of course, as the author suggests, there are things you will want to measure and determine using aggregate based statistics - you wouldn't want to determine the progress of an epidemic with anything less - but if you are interested in understanding the nature of people, especially from a personal construct perspective then this is another way worth exploring. Let the author have the last word:

“Classical models of psychological measurement, for instance, assume that errors are independent and normally distributed for each person being examined”

Well, no come to think of it, they aren't. The book is available as a download for Kindle as well as hardback which makes it more accessible price-wise. There is also a website: <http://booksite.academicpress.com/oom/>

Dennis Bury

Reference:

Grice, J. (2011) *Observation Oriented Modelling*. Amsterdam: Academic Press/Elsevier. (242 pages. 10 chapters)



A Report on the European Personal Construct Association Conference held in Dublin: 29th June - 1st July 2012 by Helen Jones

For me the most important thing about the 11th EPCA conference in Dublin was the very warm welcome we received. On Friday 28th June the weather was fine enough to walk from the hotel we were staying in to Trinity College, which was thronged with graduates receiving their degrees, visitors looking for the Book of Kells and outside the Arts Building a group of friendly PCP people all smiling and welcoming us to a warm environment for the conference. Inside, registration was easy and also very welcoming and the first morning session was marvellous. The large number of delegates were seated in a comfortable amphitheatre and the introduction began.

It was truly inspiring to hear Noirin ni Riain (my best friend at school was called Maureen Ryan but she was not this one!). Her playing of the harmonium and her beautiful singing were spellbinding and her introduction to the conference using poetry and music was really uplifting. I particularly loved hearing the words of W.B. Yeats which have always resonated for me "Silver apples of the moon... Golden apples of the sun". Her message

was that we could be aware of new beginnings and possibilities by being open to everything the conference brought us. Very appropriate as the title of the conference was "Raising Constructivist Voices: anticipating 21st Century challenges"

This was followed by a welcome from Brion Sweeney (Chairperson, Irish Constructivist Psychotherapy Association) and then some moving memories of Fay Fransella and Miller Mair, two well loved members of the PCP community who died in the last eighteen months. Sean Brophy and Bernadette O'Sullivan respectively paid great tributes to them. I think everyone in the audience felt moved by both the welcome and the memories in this first creative space in the conference.

It was lovely to see so many people that I had not seen for a long time and to catch up with them. But it was also wonderful to have so many newcomers to the conference including people from

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A Report on the European Personal Construct Association Conference held in Dublin: 29th June - 1st July 2012 by Helen Jones (cont'd)

Serbia, Italy, Germany, Israel, the Czech Republic, Spain, Sweden and even Bill Warren from Australia! It was encouraging to see so many young people taking an interest in PCP and to feel this great exchange of ideas, made for a very good atmosphere. There were no less than five strands to choose from in most sessions, apart from the plenary sessions and some of the workshops.

The wide choice was excellent but also a disadvantage as I could not get to all the presentations I wanted to attend. However, those I did go to were excellent and gave that stimulation which is one of the best things about a good conference. Meeting new people, as well as old friends, meant that with each encounter I learnt something new. I look forward to the next EPCA publication so that I can read many of the papers I missed!

It was lovely to be at Trinity College but sad that we could not all stay in the College, so that we could continue to meet and talk throughout the conference. That meant we lost a little continuity, but then again we each gathered some different experiences of Dublin.

On our final evening we had a splendid banquet at the Ely Bar and Brasserie. We had delicious food and wine and excellent musical entertainment afterwards which included our PCP quartet as well as an excellent jazz quartet well known in Ireland.

I had booked my flight home a long time ago thinking that the conference would end at lunchtime on Sunday. So unfortunately I missed the last afternoon as it was too late to change my flight home. So I missed a workshop I wanted to attend as well as the presentation of venues for future conferences....it sounds as though both the next EPCA conference in 2014 and the next International Conference after that in 2015 will both be in excellent hands and I very much hope to be at both.

Thank you so much to the Irish organising committee who took so much trouble to give us an inspiring setting and an excellent programme in June/July 2012.

And thank you to fellow participants for all the energy and good ideas and good company.

Helen Jones



Pluralism as the Constant

by

Dennis Bury

As many readers will know, there was a most interesting meeting held in Coventry on the 23rd and 24th of February 2012 under the direction of Peter Cummins, at the Clarendon Practice “Supervision in the Age of the Evidence Base” event. There were two invited lecturers, Drs David Green and Gary Latchford, and many PCP practitioners were present and were inspired by an informative presentation. The focus was essentially on “what counts as evidence?”

A feeling of relief was probably discernible as various sacred cows of therapy were wheeled on for inspection and, sometimes, even slaughter. The random control trial came in for the most scrutiny and doubts were cast about what exactly are the curative dimensions of CBT and other therapies. So we had the claim that CBT outperforms relationship-focused therapies knocked on the head. But then again, the idea that ‘relationship’ is all, was one that was also relegated to the third division in favour of other factors (Wampold, 2001).

Ah, but what to put in its place? The suggestion from the presenters was that of practice based evidence. Whilst this is not a new theme they expanded it. For example, there was the suggestion - rather Kellian in nature - that individual practitioners are themselves scientists doing research and modifying their constructions of causation and other matters as they negotiate their way through a therapy. They also asserted that such fine tuned circumspection was likely to be able to put the finger on specific curative dimensions. The final step envisaged by the presenters was of therapists cooperating in assessing the fruitfulness of their endeavours by sharing client ratings. This is not to say that such detailed exploration of PCP has not been achieved before, for example, (Watson and Winter 2005) but that a simple measurement system could provide the individualised data which could eventually move random control trials into a more modest position. Most important to note for constructive intervention is that research into PCP in therapeutic encounters is possible and

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Pluralism as the Constant

by

Dennis Bury (cont'd)

must be done. Whether PCP practitioners with an independent outlook can combine sufficiently is a matter for speculation. A book which explains all of these facets in more detail has just been published (Green and Latchford 2012).

Wider speculation though on this topic leads to the question of whether we are more into an era of plurality of techniques and attitudes which are brought to bear upon the style of dysfunction, crossing whichever disorder is encountered. In a sense, we might call this 'trans-diagnostic'. And this is close to the concept of diagnosis as George Kelly perceived it. Of course, we have to reckon with the rather distinctive and individualistic nature of George Kelly's categories, which to the present day have remained unique: hostility, loosening, constriction, and so on. These may yet have their day if we contemplate (but not for too long!) joint action.

Dennis Bury

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Green, D and Latchford, G. (2012) *Maximising the Benefits of Psychotherapy*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Wampold, B.E. (2001). *The Great Psychotherapy Debate: Models, Methods and Findings*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Watson, S and Winter, D (2006). A Process and Outcome Study of Personal Construct Psychotherapy. In D. Winter and L. Viney (eds) *Personal Construct Psychotherapy: Advances in Theory, Practice and Research*, pp 335 – 347. London: Whurr.



Contributions to the Newsletter

**Contributions to the *Constructive Interventionist*
are always warmly welcomed.**

**Contributions can be in the form of articles, book
reviews, reports on PCP workshops/conferences
or short PCP related papers on anything which
is likely to interest the PCP community.**

Please send your contributions to:

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