

Teaching constructivism or constructivist teaching? - a shared exploration 1st & 2nd February 2008

The first forum for teachers of constructivist psychotherapy/psychology took place in Padua in February with representatives from Italy, Serbia and the UK.

We engaged in constructive conversation and activity, exploring the following questions:

To what extent does our teaching practice reflect and embody the philosophy and principles of PCP?

How can we best work as constructivists in educational environments which increasingly emphasise and value standardisation, prescribed syllabi, universal competencies and formal assessment?

To what extent can a teacher, like a therapist, become a Kellyan co-researcher with our students? How is that manifested in our practice?

From a PCP perspective, what are the similarities and differences in the facilitation of change between clinical and educational settings?

As teachers of a metatheory which embraces diversity and variation, how able are we to critique and challenge PCP and its applications? Or as a 'minority' school of psychology are we more often celebrating (at best) or defending (at worst) our theory and approach?

We avoided the traditional focus on academic papers, in favour of a lived experience of constructive exploration, including biographical work, small group discussions, inspiring presentations, and a huge collaborative effort to create an alternative syllabus through art, philosophy and creative living in a session led by Francesco Velicogna called 'Global standardisation meets the personal anarchist'

We hope this is just the first meeting of a promising new network for teachers.

Mary Frances

Some reflections from Dusan Stojnov:

If one claims to believe in a theory which is different from other theories, they probably claim that they are different from the others in certain important ways. So, if we teach PCP and constructivist theory, in what important way we are or should be different from other teachers?

Kelly himself has said that object of a good school is not to control behavior, or even to 'give' the child experience. He stated that in a society convinced that freedom is more than a happy personal convenience, it also enables persons to make the most of their capacity to help each other. He was convinced that the object of school is to give each learner the opportunity to discover through her own venture who she is and what she may become – and not to dole experience in calculated amounts by the educational establishment.

It seems that today, more than fifty years after, these words sound surprisingly fresh and more relevant than ever.

Unfortunately, the task Kelly presented is not an easy one. In order to become widely accessible, knowledge is being doled in calculated amounts more than ever. It seems that emphasis in society is still not enough on personal efforts in the process of ontological acceleration, but in hyper regulation. Hyper regulation of curricula; hyper regulation of obligations; hyper regulation of relationships. Simply, hyper regulation of human condition.

Does it help? It is hard to say. And does it hurt? I don't know. But I am aware of one of its implication which I am sure that I do not like. For this occasion, I would like to call it amoebization. It means division, divorce, split and multiplication. So many organizations cannot stand the pressure of hyper regulation that they divide and multiply. And this is present in the work of therapy association of different modalities as well. So it seems those psychotherapists are human too – not being inoculated against the common human weaknesses.

Being a therapist and a therapy teacher I often ask myself where does this sudden urge for hyper regulation come from? I guess it is a solution to prevent loose a behavior, the lack of responsibility, or complications of chaos from different perspectives and approaches. The reason may be noble, but I am afraid that the price to pay for that is too high. In order to prevent the burden of differences, education authorities are advocating standardization leading to uniformity. And that is far from the opportunity for each person to discover through her own venture who she is and what she may become.

So it seems that Kelly's pledge is still there to fulfill. It is a long, long task. And I am glad that we may contribute something to it in our approach to teaching – by asking some reflexive questions and trying to discover through our own venture who we are as constructivist teachers and what we may become.

Here is my list of the questions I have become aware of so far:

1. Can we appreciate others without judging?
2. Can we offer what we have to say without imposing?
3. Can we support others with who se do not agree?
4. Can we relate without clutching?
5. Can we depend without fearing?

6. Can we open ourselves without being hurt?
7. Can we help without burning out?
8. Can we heal without prescribing?
9. Can we transcend the obvious without losing our self?
10. Can we become what we are not without feeling guilt?
11. Can we be without being in reality?
12. Can we know without knowing the truth?

Reflections from Nada Dimcovic:

I am new to the group of PCP educators, and I came with an idea that I should listen rather than actively contribute.

However, it was different experience. During the first day we got to know each other better. The summary of my own biography confirmed something I already knew, that is, that the story you tell yourself about yourself changes all the time.

Next came the group's contribution to the definition of constructivist teaching. Any theory uses a lot of highly abstract concepts, so does constructivism. More often than not I find that I lose interest in academic hair-splitting, usually at the point when I ask myself: - but what do you do with it in real life, with real people?

Not so this time. As a group we produced an extensive list of application of constructivism in arts and philosophy. Also, Mary's presentation was invaluable.

At the end we discussed what to do next. The network is already alive and the future looks promising.