

European Constructivist Therapy Network – ECTN

Report on Racconti Mediterranei

The first Summer School of ECTN

The summer school “Racconti mediterranei” (Mediterranean tales) was the first event of the European Constructivist Therapy Network (ECTN). ECTN was created during the VIII European Personal Construct Psychology Congress (Kristianstad, Sweden, April 2006); in addition to organizing international events, ECTN promotes exchanges of students and faculty between the participating training institutes, facilitates international internship programs and international collaborations in research projects and publications and supports initiatives aimed at the internationalization of PCP training.

“Racconti mediterranei” took place in Caorle, a historical lagoon town some 30 kilometers from Venice, from May 28th to June 3rd 2007 and was attended by about 46 trainees from the Padua and the Belgrade Institutes. A small waterside hotel had been reserved for the event; rooms were shared, and had been allocated so as to facilitate the mixing of students from different institutes. Two common meals a day also ensured that the language barrier (the event was entirely conducted in English) did not prove an insurmountable obstacle to Italo-Serbian friendships, which indeed flowered from the very first day, when the event opened with a welcome dinner, where Italian wine (an international favourite) flowed freely and conversation went on well past bedtime.

The formula was very simple: a week together, offering a programme of workshops and lectures, with time free for socialising, visiting in the local area, and exchanging ideas and interests in informal ways.

“Enthusiasm” was the key word of this challenging experience. Teachers and students of our schools have really exchanged experiences and learnt together in a “living” constructivist environment. So, the prime inspiration to build connections and share ideas and resources to enrich our work has been achieved.

The theme of the school was “Creativity and Constructivism”. Workshops were conducted by Massimo Giliberto (Director of the Padua training institute), Dusan Stojnov (Director of the Belgrade training institute) and Mary Frances (Director of the London training institute). The original plan was to have the workshops in the morning so to leave the afternoons and evenings free for informal groups, sightseeing and socializing. However, the somewhat unpredictable weather of the first two days suggested a change of schedule: the two first workshops (by Massimo Giliberto and Dusan Stojnov) went on till evening, so as to leave a whole day free for a group visit to Venice later in the week, while Mary Frances adhered to the original plan, holding her two workshops on two different days.

The first workshop, Massimo Giliberto’s “Creativity and clinical techniques within a radical constructivist framework”, suggested a liberating deconstruction of one of the

most hallowed icons of psychotherapy (as well as of some no less hallowed icons of contemporary PCP, who were the objects of multiple irreverent reconstructions in his riveting Powerpoint presentation). “Techniques” were demystified as no more than a tool for the achievement of one form of understanding, useful within the context of a given therapeutic relationship, which must always maintain the primacy in orienting the therapist’s choices. During several exercises, students were invited to explore in groups their own constructions of the role of techniques in therapy, to unveil the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying commonly used techniques of their choice (from the MMPI to grids) and to invent new techniques of their own, explaining their rationale and possible applications within a PCP-oriented therapeutic relationship.

Dusan Stojnov conducted the second workshop, “Being the bad, bad, bad scientist: An alternative construction of psychological disorder”, which tackled one of the most basic, and most frequently overlooked, issues in PCP. If “man-as-scientist” is the guiding metaphor of PCP, surely PCP theorists and practitioners should have some interest in how the scientific enterprise is constructed in disciplines such as the history, philosophy and sociology of science. The first part of the workshop was devoted to a learned and entertaining overview of various positions, from Karl Popper to Thomas Kuhn to Paul Feyerabend to Bruno Latour, exemplifying the latitude of possible alternative constructions of the Kellyan person. Then an alternative construction of psychological disorder, based on an original connection between the concept of hostility and the time-hallowed fallacies of ancient rhetoric, was put forward and tested in group exercises.

Later that evening, a practical demonstration of traditional Italian dances was organized by some Italian students in the hotel barroom. The music was so good, and the atmosphere so friendly, that soon most participants joined the dance floor, teaching each other the steps or reconstructing the original dances in an improptu show which went on for most of the night.

On the following day, Mary Frances found herself with a somewhat sleepy group on her hands, but she managed to get everyone awake and alert in almost no time by having each participant sing her name to a tune of her choice, and all the others take it up in a choral performance (definitely, the PCP and Art network should consider setting up a student choir!). Her workshop “Lost in the Theoretical Shuffle? PCP and Dreams” aimed at bringing into focus, in a PCP perspective, one of the most basic modes of psychic activity. Participants were encouraged to work with their dreams, alone and in pairs, as a prerequisite to being able to tackle the dreams clients bring to their session.

After a one-day break, devoted to a group excursion to Venice, where the workshops participants were joined by most of the EPCA Guidance Panel (who had a meeting scheduled for the following afternoon), Mary Frances taught her second workshop, “Capturing Creativity”, which led participants to explore multiple perspectives in conflict situations through a series of exercises.

On Sunday, goodbyes and e-mail addresses were exchanged with promises to meet again and suggestions were made for future events and for discussion collaborations. A weblog about the event is being set up; all are welcome to participate. We look forward

to welcoming more students for more European PCP institutes to “Racconti Mediterranei” II in the summer of 2008!

Some comments from participants:

Racconti Mediterranei was amazing, an experience much richer and intense than I expected. A meeting of people, different styles of workshops, subjects, histories that deal with both the teachers and us the trainees, diversities (shared only by references to the Kellian constructivism) that are met and ‘contaminated’, generating an enthusiasm and energy that was both palpable and surprising.

Gigi Fiorin

Wow, what a constructive week!

Chiara Arneri

Caorle was an experience so meaningful, amazing and funny... Thanks to who “packaged the gift”.

Chiara Lui

After Caorle? The Post-Caorlian Disorder.

Alessandro Simeone

For me it was a creative experience, the right dose of tightening and loosening. A successful cocktail.

Giulia Macoratti

Racconti Mediterranei for me has meant a revelation of a new way to feel and be there for others. Thanks to each of you it was possible to face different ways of emotionalizing, of living, of being in relationships, of advancing, of being, that I felt at times far away from mine, but they captivated me, made me curious and I had been searching for them because I felt they were important to me.

Elena Vallin

Carmen Dell’Aversano

June, 2007