

**Celebrating 102 issues worth of service to  
the personal construct community**

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The editors endeavour to publish this newsletter four times a year in:

- March
- June
- September
- December

Deadline for contributions is the 1<sup>st</sup> of each of the above months.

**Note to members:**

Remember, this is YOUR newsletter, so if you would like to see something in particular in it, would like to see a change in its format, or would like to submit an article, please let us know. Without your contributions, it may cease to exist!

Contributions must comply with APS guidelines. These can be obtained from the APS website, or the editors on request.

Dear member

Welcome to the 102<sup>nd</sup> APS Personal Construct Interest Group Newsletter. In this edition we carry two book reviews and two articles along with our regular items.

On page two there is a review of a new book by Andresen, Oades and Caputi, *Psychological recovery: Beyond mental illness*. On page four is an article by Peter Farrell on his work with education professionals on reflexive practice.

On page six is the first in our new occasional series on 'Significant contributors to PCT', an article on Linda Viney, by the Wollongong Personal Construct Peer Consultation Group.

And, on page eight, the first in our series on 'Important works in PCT and constructivism', Millar Mair's 1989 work, *Between psychology and psychotherapy*, is considered.

We wish you a safe holiday season and a happy and productive 2012. We hope you enjoy reading the 102<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Newsletter.

Michael Henman PhD &  
Desley Hennessy

**Inside the 102<sup>nd</sup> issue**

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**Book review** – by Michael Henman

**Andresen, R., Oades, L.G., & Caputi, P. (2011). *Psychological recovery: Beyond mental illness*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. Hardcover, 190 pages.**

Given the increased focus on consumer perspectives in mental health generally, the person-centred approach in disability services and the notion of recovery and psychosocial disability in people with mental illness in particular (e.g., NMHC&CF, 2011), Andresen et al.'s work seems a rather timely addition to the literature. As the present context is not the place for an exhaustive review, I will confine myself to an outline of the book and what I see as its highlights.

Structurally the work consists of 11 chapters divided into four parts. These are: Part I – Recovery in historical context (Chpt 1. Introduction: Recovery from schizophrenia, 2. Conceptualising recovery: A consumer-oriented approach); Part II – Elaboration of the model: From hopelessness to flourishing (seven chapters with 3 to 7 being the five stages of recovery, 3. Moratorium, 4. Awareness, 5. Preparation, 6. Rebuilding; 7. Growth; and then, 8. Common questions regarding the model); Part III – Measuring recovery (9. Recovery-oriented outcome measurement); and Part IV – Towards a positive future (10. Psychological recovery and positive psychology, 11. Reflections and future directions).

The first chapter deals with, amongst other areas, the history of schizophrenia, prognostic pessimism and its causes, the more recent evidence for recovery as not only possible but demonstrable, and the emergence of the recovery movement. I appreciated the discussion of the evidence on how people can, and do, recover as my experience in this area over the last dozen years or so has led me to the view that it does indeed occur and that this realisation is only something that can come about with sufficient time in the field and deliberate reflection upon one's experiences. And, that we do not remind ourselves (or our colleagues) of this often enough. Indeed, it is the overarching note of (substantiated) hopefulness that is, perhaps, one of the authors' main contributions to the recovery literature.

The second chapter details how consumers have tended to define recovery while noting that there is far from any one agreed upon definition in consumers' accounts of their journey. This chapter is also where the authors first introduce their "four overarching psychological processes" identified in the literature: finding and maintaining hope; taking responsibility for health and well-being; establishing a positive identity; and, finding meaning in life. It is also where they first describe their five stages of the recovery process, with each giving their name to Chapters 3 to 7 respectively: Moratorium; Awareness; Preparation; Rebuilding; and Growth.

It is in these five chapters/stages where each of the four psychological processes, along with other information, are examined with the authors structuring the discussion of each around quotes from consumers about their experience and draw on relevant concepts in the broader psychological literature (e.g., from the fields of trauma, hope, identity and well-being).

It is the complexity of their model (5 stages x 4 processes; an issue acknowledged by the authors) that is my main, albeit minor, concern with the model and hence the

book. But, of course, people *are* complex and many factors and processes are at play in such an area, so the fact that one needs to work a little harder at understanding such a model – and it is of course one that is well researched and credible – than one would like is not necessarily a criticism.

Chapter 8 is a short and interesting one that addresses ten of the most common questions the authors have been asked about their model, many of which will be of particular interest to consumers. For example, “Isn’t this just another set of standards for consumers to be measured against?”

In Chapter 9 the authors set out why the measurement of recovery is important, detail tools used to measure outcomes – both clinician and consumer rated – and describe tools that allow for the measurement of recovery as defined by consumers. The chapter ends with the authors describing three measures of recovery they have been involved in developing. Those readers involved in researching this area may well find this chapter this most interesting and useful of all.

In Chapter 10 the “clear parallels” between positive psychology and the recovery literature are examined and a number of ways in which it could be combined with the recovery literature for the benefit of consumers are explored. For those interested in PCT (or at least constructivism and those theories consistent with it) the work will not jar as positive psychology has many commonalities with PCT including its emphasis on psychological processes (note PCT’s experience cycle), its inherent hopefulness, the importance of the construction of meaning and a sense of self, and its eschewing of the medical model. The work ends with Chapter 11 where key ideas explored in the work are recapped and a few pages are devoted to current and future research directions.

The book is probably of most use to undergraduate students and those professionals early in their careers in the various disciplines involved in working with people with the “mentally ill” label. But perhaps it is also a useful text for those who have been in the field a good while and have felt that this “recovery” focus idea has snuck up on them and they need to update themselves with its key ideas. Finally, I would note that the book is quite well written and edited (I seem to remember counting only four typographical errors) and, at only 155 pages of actual text, not physically imposing, something that both busy professionals and overwhelmed students, will no doubt appreciate.

In summary, I would recommend the book to all those professionals who are interested in the topic and consider themselves to be members of the broader constructivist family on the basis of its important content, its well structured argument and its well written prose. I would also recommend it to consumers who are looking to read a well researched, credible piece of work on recovery from a psychological perspective that has taken great care to reflect consumers’ experience of recovery from mental illness and that offers us all hope that recovery is indeed possible.

#### References

National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum (2011). *Unravelling psychosocial Disability, A Position Statement on Psychosocial Disability Associated with Mental Health Conditions*. Canberra: NMHCCF.

*Book kindly provided for review by Wiley-Blackwell. – Eds.*

Readers may be aware that APS members can obtain a 25% discount on books published by Wiley when purchases are made via the publisher's website. See [www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-406742.html](http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-406742.html) or, search "Wiley" from the APS Home Page.

### **Reflexivity and the development of leadership in education** - by Peter Farrell

I am a teaching-principal of a very small rural school in Victoria (Zeerust PS, 16 students - one classroom). My Ed.D thesis made substantial use of PCT (personal construct theory) and RGT (repertory grid technique) to determine the differences in world outlook between teaching and non-teaching principals. For the past three years I have been working as the coordinator, on a part-time basis, with aspirant leaders from schools around Shepparton, Victoria to develop their leadership potential (Central Sub-region Leadership Development). It is purely voluntary and it is my way of contributing to the system I work for.

This year, in the absence of a centrally delivered theoretical component I introduced professional reflection to the aspirants. The ideas of Donald Schon, around reflective practice, really resonated with me, and one of his particular tweaks on reflective practice is to reflect upon reflection-in-action. This seemed an ideal point to use RGT and PCT.

For 2011 I had 10 aspirant leaders and they and I each wrote a dozen reflections. The reflections were in three sections: What happened? What were you thinking at the time? And, in which domain of Sergiovanni's leadership domain did this event fit and what level? Sergiovanni (2006) describes the five domains of leadership as being technical, educative, human, symbolic and cultural and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, for whom we all work, has adopted this model as its framework for leadership development. When the aspirants reach 12 reflections we get together for an intensive one on one to develop their reflections into personal constructs.

First, I ask the aspirants to select 10 out of the 12 their reflections (they must include one personal reflection) and these become the elements in the RGT. Then, using triadic elicitation, and thinking in terms of their own management and leadership, each aspirant begins the process of creating personal constructs. At the end I supply them with one construct about how this reflection was a good example of [their] leadership vs. this reflection is a poor example of [their] leadership. All this is done in Excel which is set up to automatically correlate everything. After a couple of examples, the aspirants are clever enough to fill in the spreadsheet themselves. Our initial analysis involves highlighting the significant correlations between constructs and using these as a basis for discussing their administrative orientation and educational philosophy.

A major component of what I do is the analysis the aim of which is to provoke in each aspirant deeper reflection upon their reflection-in-action about their own management and leadership. I tell them they should be aiming for a coherent personal narrative.

My analysis begins with aggregating the preferred and implicit end of the constructs and using these to tell a simple story about the aspirant. What they like and what they don't. Next I look at the correlation between the supplied construct and any

personal construct. I am keen to follow up any subsequent correlations as these form part of their coherent personal narrative. Next the significant correlations between the other personal constructs are looked at. I am particularly interested in any superordinate themes. I do look at the elements. There are two supplied elements, 'Me now' and 'Future me' do help to identify particular reflections which might be exemplars for the aspirant either now or in the future.

Next using an administrative orientation framework which includes bureaucratic, managerial and leadership orientations I try to identify where the aspirant is right now by comparing and contrasting their personal constructs with the three theoretical constructs.

The aspirants have been surprised by how well I understand them - but really, as we PCT aficionados know, they give the game away themselves.

#### References

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2006). *The Principalship: A reflective practice perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

### **Significant contributors to PCT – Occasional series**

This issue sees the first in our new occasional (once a year or so) series on those people who have made significant contributions to PCT. Suggestions from readers on others who should be so recognised would be welcomed by the editors.

#### **Linda Viney – by, Wollongong Personal Construct Peer Consultation Group**

Linda Viney has achieved an outstanding career as an academic, researcher, teacher, author and psychotherapist. These achievements have been informed by the personal construct assumption that people actively make sense of their worlds.

Linda now holds the position of Honorary Professorial Fellow having held the position of A/Prof directing the Clinical Postgraduate Program for 15 years, at the University of Wollongong. As academic administrator, Linda passionately cared and lobbied for learning environments that promote a thinking and reflective approach to best professional practice. As a researcher, Linda sets out to apply personal construct ideas to developing techniques of assessment and measurement of people's meaning making, giving consumers of mental health across the life span a voice.

By focusing on the interpretations of the meaning-making of people in their changing social contexts, Linda has developed quantitative and qualitative assessment techniques with her most recent publication, *Personal Construct Methodology* (2012), encapsulating some of these endeavours. As a teacher transforming students into psychologists, Linda teaches and actively promotes the ethical and professional code of conduct of psychology. As a Foundation Member and Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society, and former Chair of the Psychology Registration Board, Linda continues to champion the relevance and rigor of the profession of psychology.

With her research supervisees Linda guides her students through the rough and unpredictable seas providing an anchor as construing is loosened and tightened, changes are contemplated and creative insights achieved. Linda is always there, she sticks with you showing tremendous courage, inspiring in you the belief you can

achieve. Linda guides her supervisees by encouragement and emotionally holds you while you make that conceptual leap she understands is needed.

As an author Linda is prodigious, publishing in the areas of clinical, counselling and health psychology over 185 articles and books covering topics such as measurement and assessment, lifespan developmental psychology, clinical and counselling psychology and the psychology of health and illness. With an emphasis on processes and on evaluation, her contribution has extended the principles and assumptions of personal construct psychology to the various social contexts of consumers of mental health services. As a psychotherapist, Linda demonstrates that unique ability to provide the psychological space for her clients to formulate and express their interpretations of events in their lives. These skills are passed on to other psychologists through clinical supervision and her published writings on individual supervision and group supervision/peer consultation.

Throughout her professional life and in her personal context, Linda is comfortable with new ideas, creating ways by which to articulate these insights and to utilise these interpretations to measure and explain the meaning-making of people in their social context.

*Suggestions for, or pieces on, those who have made significant contributions to PCT are very welcome – Eds.*

### **Important works in PCT and constructivism**

In Issue 100 (June 2011) a new series entitled, “Important works In PCT and constructivism” was flagged as a regular addition for future Newsletters. The editors are pleased to bring readers the first of the works to be considered in this series.

**Mair, M. (1989). *Between psychology and psychotherapy: a poetics of experience*. London: Routledge, 292 pages.** – By Desley Hennessy

In his introduction, Mair stated: “without doubt this is a biased book. It does not present an even-handed view”. In fact, what it did was give us a window into his meaning-making. The book is divided into three parts. In the first, an argument is made for a “conversational” rather than an “experimental” psychology. Part 2 contains some personal writings from the period 1972 to 1981. This section is dedicated to Jane, who died in 1981, when he “returned to Scotland to face life without her”. In these writings, Mair was trying to find personal meaning. Part 3 includes a number of his diary entries. The diary entries for 27 and 28 October, 1984 contain themes including:

- Approaching psychology from the direction of psychotherapy;
- Knowledge by analogy;
- The passion to know;
- Living in conversation; and
- The value of coming to know ABOUT.

These entries appear to be the genesis of the ideas expressed in this book. Mair referred to what he called the *conversing* self, where life is one of quest and questioning. “We create realities by and through the conversational practices we are



involved within and undertake” (p 272). Our posture to living allows for the openness to future knowing that Kelly’s approach implied.

A conversational psychology should be concerned with all aspects of conversation, and not just experiments. To many of us, this may seem pretty obvious. But what some may not always remember is that psychology has not always been the way it is now. Sure, we learnt at university about Thomas Szasz and RD Laing and the anti-psychiatry movement. Who amongst us was taught of the fight put up by Miller Mair? Did you know he was “one of a small group who – reacting against the behavioural orthodoxy of the 1950s – established a framework in which people were viewed as complex social beings”? Or that, “Miller and his colleagues demonstrated that there was far more to therapeutic psychology than trying to modify behaviour through reward and punishment”? (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/aug/08/miller-mair-obituary>). I certainly didn’t.

Mair argued for a psychology of the “between” – of conversation between client and therapist. He said that words help us know, find, create and own something of our selves. In his view, the psychotherapist should enter into some kind of conversation with the client with the intention of facilitating some degree of greater understanding, and encouraging new ways of acting which may break the deadlock of past rigidities. He believed it was necessary to move from conventional, academic psychology to psychotherapy as a world of purposive make-believe. We practise *responsible knowing* when we undertake what we know to be an imaginative and moral choice.

Fundamentally, psychology is about communication. Mair believed we needed to practise in an intermediary, rather than investigative mode. He was big on the use of metaphor, drawing a parallel between impressionists and the psychotherapeutic research movement. He felt that judging if someone is getting better is like judging a good story, song or painting.

The “poems” in Part 2 hold examples of his many, often contradictory, selves. I found “Let go” (p 187) quite moving. This was the first piece in this collection written after Jane’s death. Part 3 is, to me, very PCP in its reflexivity, but also extremely generous of Miller – allowing us glimpses of himself. In fact, he was practising what he “preached” earlier – personally knowing. He emphasised that a poetic awareness and attentiveness is fundamental to any pursuit of understanding of ourselves or others. “*I am a fragment of reality struggling to know itself*” (p 103). When discussing knowing personally, which Mair said is coming to know yourself, and relying on your own experiencing, there are three main questions.

1. Who or what are you to trust?  
You are the only instrument of knowing you will always have with you. One needs to improvise, starting from your own experience, and continually return to it. To do this, we need to learn to live dynamically so that we can gain understanding without “certified signposts”.
2. How can I enter more fully into my own or someone else’s experiencing?  
We need recourse to make-believe, which leads us into the realm of the possible and the unproven. We arrive in a place where everything we know is called into question. Mair told us that every vehicle of human expression

(poetry, music, physics) is potentially useful for searching to know as a living thing. “The person locked in inarticulate loneliness may become a thriving, bustling “community of selves” when they begin to explore themselves as *if* they are more than an isolated island, a unitary soul” (p 18).

3. How much of yourself or of other people, are you willing to know?  
If you need to listen to the person in the context of their whole life, this may require almost all of who you are to meet almost all of them. Are you willing to risk that?

There is a quote in the conclusion, “We are inhabited by stories we know by and do not know about. We are peopled by story lines, characters, plots, endings and styles” (p 285), that reminded me of another by Muriel Rukeyser, “The universe is made of stories, not of atoms”. Both really resonate with me.

I was lucky enough to be given this book by Beverly Walker when she was “spring cleaning” her office at the University of Wollongong. Being a therapist who loves listening to my clients’ stories, and having spent hours of my PhD research listening to tattoo stories, it was inspiring to read this. I really love that Mair was arguing for a conversational psychology over 20 years ago, and we get to see that psychologists are choosing to practise it. This is not a “how-to” book, nor is it particularly easy to read in places, but I think it does give you an idea of Miller Mair’s generosity and foresight and a very real window into how he tried to make meaning in his world. The book is available (used) through Amazon.com in hard and soft cover.

*Suggestions for, or reviews of, works for this section are very welcome – Eds (see p. 1 for submission details)*

### **Internet site of Issue 102 – PCP-net**

Yes, this PCP site ([www.pcp-net.de/](http://www.pcp-net.de/)) was highlighted in the last edition of this Newsletter but it is so useful as a gateway to so many resources that it is being mentioned again. From this page, one can access pages such as: “PCP and Philosophy” ([www.pcp-net.org/philosophy/welcome.html](http://www.pcp-net.org/philosophy/welcome.html)); “Future PCP conferences” ([www.pcp-net.de/info/future.html](http://www.pcp-net.de/info/future.html)); and, “The PCP News Blog” ([www.pcp-net.de/info/info/news.html](http://www.pcp-net.de/info/info/news.html)). Members are encouraged to visit the site regularly, especially the news and future conferences pages.

### **Other items of interest**

#### **An interest group and a seminar forum**

A PCP interest group meets at the University of Wollongong (UoW) on the second Thursday of every second month in the counselling rooms at 6pm. The next meeting will be Thursday 9 February 2012. For further information, contact Desley Hennessy (see p. 1 for Desley’s details).

PCP seminars are held at the University of Wollongong’s School of Psychology weekly in session. If you are interested in attending, please contact Peter Caputi ([pcaputi@uow.ed.au](mailto:pcaputi@uow.ed.au)).

#### **Upcoming conferences**



At its last meeting, the Committee of the APS PCP Interest Group it was reported that representatives who attended the Boston Conference in July gained agreement for the 20<sup>th</sup> International Congress on PCP to be held in Australia in 2013.

For details of conferences members are advised to consult the APS website on a regular basis.

### Kelly's 1955 book

The tastiest *other item of interest* is that Kelly's (1955) book (well, Vol I anyway), *The Psychology of Personal Constructs: A Theory of Personality*, is back in print!! It is published by Nabu Public Domain Reprints and, as you can guess by the publisher's name, it is basically just a copy of the original work (complete with "KANSAS CITY (MO.) PUBLIC LIBRARY" stamped on the first contents page). A brief explanation by the publisher on the second page sets out that this is possible due to the work being out of copyright. The main drawback of this approach is that the quality of the scan of the original library copy is far from perfect (text is only poor to fair photocopy standard) but the big advantage is (along with it now being easily available again) that the page numbers are, of course, the same as the original. I acquired my copy via an Australian based on-line book retailer. So, dear members, you can now once again easily acquire a printed copy of Kelly's tome.

### Quote of the issue

Tom Ravenette (1999):

**"what people do is...very much a matter of how they make sense of themselves and their circumstances....this is their *construction* of themselves and the world. The world in this context is the subjective world of personal action, interaction and experience...not the objective world."**

**The person's sense of self is highly relevant to the realm of interpersonal relations "because when individuals misconstrue each other there are likely to be failures in communication leading to massive misunderstandings and, in turn, covert, if not overt, hostility" (p. 197).**

In this season of goodwill to all that we are now in, one could do worse than use these passages as starting points to ponder the efforts we make to truly understand others.

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