

Berichte

Mary Bourne Kilborn

The Second PCA Colloquium, Kranichberg, Austria, 10–12 July 1999 – A Personal Impression

Mary Bourne Kilborn worked in the Counselling Unit at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. At several person-centred conferences she dealt with certain aspects of the nature of the therapeutic relationship.

Mary Kilborn was a participant of the Second Person-Centred Colloquium at Kranichberg, Austria, in July 1999, convened by the Austrian PCA. At this occasion I learned to know her and to value her contributions to the colloquium. I will rememorate her as a wise and gentle person. She describes in this article her personal impressions of this meeting.

Mary Kilborn died unexpectedly during the Chicago Conference on June 28, 2000. She also had planned to be at the conference, but got severely ill two weeks before.

(Peter F. Schmid)

This was the second occasion when an international group of people concerned with the Person-Centered Approach and Client-Centered Psychotherapy have gathered together for an informal meeting to exchange ideas and consider questions of personal and scientific interest. The first occasion was after the First World Congress for Psychotherapy in Vienna in 1996¹. At this Conference itself, client-centred therapy had had hardly any profile. There were few person-centred presentations, and the person-centred meetings tended to find themselves away from the main event. The Person-Centred Colloquium which followed immediately after agreed to work on redressing this balance. At the Second World Conference, Vienna 1999, efforts were made for there to be an obvious person-centred presence. Maureen O'Hara and Peter F. Schmid were invited to give keynote lectures, Elisabeth Zinschitz and Peter Frenzel played an active part in the organising. Barbara Brodley, Lore Korbei, Elisabeth Zinschitz, Christiane Geiser and Ed Kahn among others presented papers. Brodley, Schmid, Korbei and Kahn were involved in panel discussion on the subject 'Non-directivity in the PCA – Myth or Reality?'

1 For a report of the Colloquium in Bad Hall cf. Frenzel, Peter / Schmid, Peter F., Von der Herausforderung, die eigene Power zu gebrauchen. Bericht über ein Treffen personzentrierter Wissenschaftler, Bad Hall, Juli 1996, in: app-kontakte 2 (1996) 37–54; also in: Personzentriert 1 (1997) 87–107.

The aim at both the Person-Centred Colloquia, convened by the "Person-Centred Association in Austria (PCA)", was to have a candid exchange of views. Participants were encouraged to explore preliminary ideas and subjects not yet ready for final publication or not destined to be presented to a larger audience. For this reason, numbers have been limited. All those who attended in 1996 were invited again. They were also asked to suggest names of others, people who have written and published on person-centred theory and who might be interested to attend.

I did not attend at Bad Hall, in 1996. However, Professor Dave Mearns in whose Counselling Unit I work at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow asked me if I would be interested in attending this year as he was unable to. I was particularly excited when I saw the list of participants with names like Barbara Temaner Brodley, Peter Schmid, Brian Thorne and Margaret Warner².

Arrival – a personal touch

I travelled from Edinburgh with Elke Lambers and we met up with Brian Thorne at Amsterdam airport. Once in Vienna, the three of us took the bus to the Südbahnhof. There it took the combined efforts of our intelligence, wits and German to find the train which would take us to the town of Gloggnitz, near Kranichberg, in the Austrian Alps. As the train continued on its way, we realized we would have no idea when Gloggnitz was approaching, although our ticket proudly told us we would be travelling 72 km. To while away the time, we looked at brochures of the hotel where we would be staying — the former summer residence of the cardinals of Vienna.

2 Participants in the Kranichberg Colloquium 1999 were: Stan van Asbroeck (B), Eva Maria Biermann-Ratjen (D), Johannes Binder (D), Ute Binder (D), Barbara Temaner Brodley (USA), Rainer Bürki (CH), Christian Fehring (A), Christiane Geiser (CH), Sheila Haugh (GB), Vladimir Hlavenka (SK), Beate Hofmeister (D), Ed Kahn (USA), Mary Kilborn (GB), Lore Korbei (A), Elke Lambers (GB), Lawrie Moloney (AUS), Hans Peters (NL), Marlis Pörtner (CH), Peter F. Schmid (A), Hermann Spielhofer (A), Brian Thorne (GB), Margaret Warner (USA), Paul Wilkins (GB), Marietta Winkler (A), Anne Wunderle (CH), Elisabeth Zinschitz (A).

It stood high above the valley, with stunning views over the Alps, with old-fashioned rooms and furniture, and a large indoor swimming pool with huge glass panels. I had mixed feelings. It looked like the perfect spot for a relaxing, restorative time, while musing on person-centred theory. But I had not brought my swimming costume, I who so love swimming! On arrival in Gloggnitz, I asked the taxi driver to make a detour to a sports shop. While he and Brian chatted German outside, Elke and I went in to purchase a swimming costume for me. I was therefore able to swim every day before breakfast and the evening meal. The setting certainly played its part in allowing a group of person-centred practitioners to relax together, enjoy beautiful views and stand back from our practice and consider the hypotheses and theoretical concepts which underpin our work.

Large group

The majority of the time was spent in the large group of all the participants. This created an environment in which people could share ideas in an informal setting. After the usual time spent sharing aims and expectations, various topics for discussion were suggested: Empathy; Unconditional Positive Regard; What We Really Mean by Congruence; Power, Authority and Gender; The Spiritual Dimension in the Person-Centred Approach; Controversy and Conflict; Non-Directivity; Self-concept; Empathy with Clients with Severe Disorders; Links between PCA and Eating Disorders, Drug Addiction etc.; Beyond Carl Rogers; The Person-Centred Approach in the World. It was decided to have a large group discussion as the basis of our work together and at times to break into smaller groups for specific topics.

The actualizing tendency and the encounter

There was a huge breadth of ideas expressed in the larger group. The view was put forward that what Rogers offered was huge, it constituted a paradigm shift, it dealt with how to encounter life. For political reasons, it is good for us to stay as one big person-centred family, for theoretical reasons it is good to have sharp differences. The purpose of this meeting is for us to clarify out ideas, establish common beliefs and also be aware of our differences.

The discussion opened with a consideration of two essential paradigms presented by Rogers: the actualizing tendency and the encounter. It was pointed out that there is a lot of disagreement on this in the person-centred world, although Rogers himself did not make the distinction. Gendlin wanted to create the encounter, to direct the process, now it would appear that he has returned to stressing the importance of the relationship. It was stressed by the group that much depends on the strength of the person of the therapist in order for the encounter to take place. There is a need for us to link experience and meaning, we aim to meet the client, we need also to

conceptualize this. We need a clear formulation of our approach, we need to be able to explain it. Yet, there is no clear 'it' at the beginning of a therapeutic relationship, it is more a creative process during which 'it' becomes clear. Some participants saw it in terms of negotiating a meaning with their clients. If we are wanting to define experience, we move into the phenomenological field of self-concept. This raises the question: Can the self be conceptualized without being in relation? If I feel threatened of being exterminated, I shift from my self to, for example, my intellect. At times I can say more to another than I could ever have said to myself. Faced with the fear of a lack of connection with others, of being "thrown out of the human race", the unconditional acceptance of another plays a vital role. Possibly, there is no self as such, just a cluster of selves in relation.

Expanding person-centred theory

It was pointed out that Rogers was more than a therapist. Indeed, in the last years he was not particularly interested in individual therapy. Person-centred practitioners suffer from philosophical hesitancy, as we do not want to move to problem solving. Some present felt there is not enough material published on the links between the person-centred approach and specific issues such as eating disorders, drug addiction etc. We need to find a way without losing our person-centredness.

Margaret Warner stated, as she has in the past, that we are many tribes with one tradition and that there are "respectable clusters". Peter Schmid argued that we need to stop trying to find one common ground and name and respect the differences. Brian Thorne asked whether we are trying to join a culture which we critique? He feels that we should be trying to be counter-cultural, yet many person-centred counsellors are not confident enough for this. The discussion turned to what we mean by experiencing. In terms of person-centred theory, a fully functioning person is open to experience (unless it is too dangerous).

The person-centred approach and evil

The view was put forward that the concept of a forward-moving human being is hard to believe in the face of so much evil in the world. Some participants felt that the contexts in which they work brings them in touch with some of the darker sides of human behaviour. Person-centred theory must try to encompass this. Barbara Brodley referred to her paper offered at the Second World Congress 'Did Carl Rogers' Positive View of Human Nature Bias His Psychotherapy?' She refers to research which suggests that Rogers shows a tendency to bias his responses towards his clients' negative feelings, especially when the client was expressing the angry kind of feelings and attitudes. She feels the study rebuts the positive bias accusation against client-centred therapy promulgated by Rollo May

and others. Margaret Warner said that faced with someone who has had dreadful experiencing, she knows of no better way of helping that person than being present. The general feeling of those in the group was that they as person-centred practitioners do respond to the issue of evil, to the dark side of their clients.

The impact of the person-centred approach

One participant wondered why clients who have had person-centred therapy do not go out to change the world? Could it be that Rogers' work has in fact had little impact? Barbara Brodley said that from her experience there are signs that clients do have energy and are released to be more politically aware. Other participants felt their initial hopes are not being realized. We cannot all agree. Peter Schmid concluded on an optimistic note, stating that if one looks back over the history of psychoanalysis, it is clear that PC although often rejected will have an impact. The Person-Centred Approach can offer a lot in today's world with its facilitation of emancipation and democracy. He said he spoke as one who works in the Catholic Church, one of the most successful hierarchical organisations ever. As an example he mentioned the impact PC had on theology and pastoral care.

The issue of gender

There was some disagreement as to how central this issue is. For some participants, the differences between men and women forms the core of their work, for others, the humanity rather than the gender of each client is the main concern. The vigour with which some participants defended their views highlighted the debate as to the degree to which the social and the cultural impacts upon the actualising tendency, the self-concept, the human, the spiritual.

Power and the PCA

The discussion on gender moved to other areas where power can be exercised. One that received particular attention was that of language. There is much research and writing on PCA going on in the world, yet it seems that this has little chance of being widely known unless it is translated into English. It was argued that those who have a good command of English are seen as having power, even by those whose mother tongue is English.

Small groups

As often happens in the person-centred world, much discussion went into the forming of small groups. Sheets were placed on the floor with suggested titles and people signed up for those they were

interested in. Although the process took time, a shape developed organically, small groups were formed, answering many of the participants' wishes.

The Spiritual Dimension: a small group of participants discussed the definition of spirituality and its relevance to client-centred therapy. Some felt it was at the core, others felt it was no relevant to the therapeutic relationship. Rogers' interest in matters spiritual at the end of his life was seen either as an important development in his thinking or an irrelevant deviation of a man in his later years.

Video

Early one morning, a small group gathered to watch a video of a participant with a schizophrenic client. It was moving to see how the therapist worked and how the client responded. This contrasted sharply with the hospital staff's approach. To me, the work showed proof of psychological contact.

Reflection group

Responding to the wishes of a number of participants, it was agreed to clear an hour after lunch on each of the three days for an optional group to encounter and reflect. I chose to attend this group, so that I could experience a sharing and a meeting with others on a more personal level. Between a half and a third of participants attended. For me, this highlighted the desire of some to form a bridge between the professional and the personal, theory and emotional experiencing.

Conclusion

I went expecting there to be a high level of intellectual, theoretical input. I found that this did, at times, happen and it went so fast I could barely capture it. As often in person-centred gatherings, there was an attempt to capture the theoretical and the personal in the one meeting. Although there was no planned structure, one grew organically out of our discussions. A lot of the topics which were raised were covered. Moreover, I experienced the level of academic debate to be very high. Some of those present are clear thinkers who spend time reflecting on person-centred theory. The range of interests was broad. A book emerged as a result of the first informal colloquium in 1996: *Person-Centred Therapy. A European perspective*, Ed. Brian Thorne and Elke Lambers. And the idea for what is now the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counselling was born in Bad Hall. I do not yet know what will emerge from this meeting. However, this small article is a first attempt to capture my experience of the event.