

Isobel McGilray

Psychosynthesis: *The customer's angle*

Isobel is a professional Alexander teacher. She has not done any groups, except a short 3 month's course on TA. This she found fantastic for offering a very quick map with which to look at problems, but not much help to deal with them.

'I'm uncomfortable in a group situation' she says. 'PS allowed me to go my own pace my own way, in a very non-threatening situation.' She did - the basic training and a ten-week on-going group, and nine months individual work on a once a week, once a fortnight basis.

Why did I take up Psychosynthesis? I seemed to be in a groove, in relationships and in my work. I had a pattern of involvement with men who didn't want commitment in a relationship. And I wasn't sure what I was trying to achieve or where I wanted to go in my work situation.

Psychosynthesis offered me a chance to work in a non-thinking, one-to-one situation, at my own pace, with a system of techniques that made sense to me. With its inclusion of the spiritual side and emphasis on the whole, I felt it had more to offer me than some of the other systems. I was too reserved, too controlled, too much in my mind to be able to work with break-through confrontation techniques.

In terms of the problem of relationships, the most important insight was discovering a part of me that believed that 'men didn't have feelings', 'men won't let me do what I want'. I found I had set a pattern with my brother - I must limit myself so as to show him up. No wonder I didn't let myself find a man who might want a committed relationship! Using imagery and Gestalt techniques, I was able to step away from these beliefs and find the potential behind them.

Result, I feel free to be myself, knowing that any limitations are coming from me, not from a potential partner. In fact, I'm now enjoying what promises to be a fairly stable relationship, remarkably free from game-playing. As long as I was stuck with the subconscious view of men as unfeeling creatures who would block me, I had little chance of seeing the real person I was trying to relate to.

In terms of my work situation, I got a clearer and wider view of what my purpose is, partly by stepping away from 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts,' and partly by contacting my higher purpose. I've been going through a very creative period, following my own energy in line with my central self, no longer being pulled in different directions by conflicting parts of me.

And so I'm sure enough of who I am, to feel that my way is my way and I don't wish now to follow a system. The system gave me freedom not to need the system. I believe that truth is in evolution, and if I say 'this is it', I have fixed it and it is no longer truth, even though that insight may be a vital stepping stone to the next truth.

Psychosynthesis has been a valuable stepping-stone, but now, using one of its techniques I choose to step away from the system, because the map is not the road, There came a point when the ideas became confusing, and too mental, the process of dis-identification began to evoke feelings of futility - if being a higher self is where it is at, why bother to struggle through life? It seemed time to dis-identify with the system, take the insights I had and go my own way.

Fay Fransella, and Kelly's Personal Construct Theory.

Is it a Humanistic Psychology?

I can never distinguish what it is makes groups of people pleasant or unpleasant to be in, whether it is the people or the setting: in the case of the Saturday AHP Workshop at Ithaca College it was probably a contribution from both that made for the easy, relaxed feeling. Or was it Fay Fransella's water-like lucidity, gentle as the wind, making complex things seem fairly simple? It was very pleasant indeed. Perhaps because we were told that this was an all embracing theory and nothing lay outside, there was an enveloping sense of security. . . .we would hear it all, and then there would be nothing more, outside, to worry about.

I had gone along to hear what Kelly was about because I had been attracted by the general impression of his ideas that I'd received; but such teachers of psychology as I'd had had always skated over his work with a casual reference, assuming that either everyone knew about it, or that there was nothing to know, or that I'd find out myself when I had time if I was interested. And somehow I never did. Possibly it was to do with the fact that Kelly's work is hidden away in a couple of volumes which cost £25.

So thirty of us sitting mainly in spine-twisting deep soft sofas around the edges of a large expanse of pile carpet spent Saturday weaving our minds through the fascinating intricacies of constructs. I take away the fact that Fay had plotted the personal constructs of her cats: and perhaps, behind all that happened, they were there, prowling around disconcertingly on the carpet as cats do in groups of people, suddenly fastening onto a person in a way that makes me want to laugh (conflict/contradiction/challenge to my personal constructs).

The theory we are told (because of the way we are told it) is logical, and inclusive - a told psychology. Kelly has even divided weeping into fourteen categories and converted emotions into constructs. As with cats, it doesn't depend on language.

Well, we know that that is so. The important thing to recognise is that because each individual experience is unique, the individual has built up a unique system of constructs arising out of it. Therefore each person's constructual world is different from mine, and from another's. There are however shared things in experience for example language, culture and these common constructs enable communication to take place. It is an elaborate jigsaw puzzle and heaven help you if you put the pieces together in the wrong way, or lose one. . . .or maybe don't even know the picture you are making (but how many do. . . .we all rely on the matching of shapes, and that requires a more abstract and fundamental comprehension of reality, to do with pure