The Basics of Personal Construct Psychology and its Methods of Inquiry

A distance learning course

Course Tutor:

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www.psy.herts.ac.uk/cpcp/courses.html

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The Basics of Personal Construct Psychology
and its Methods of Inquiry

George Kelly’s personal construct theory covers the two essential aspects of living in our own personal worlds (i) how we make sense of what is happening around us and (ii) how we feel about and experience those happenings. This course provides a secure grounding in the basics of personal construct theory, its philosophy, its methods of inquiry and some of its interpersonal skills.

The better known of his methods of inquiry, the repertory grid, is covered both from a qualitative and quantitative measurement standpoint. The less well known self characterisation is based on Kelly’s first principle “if you don’t know what is wrong with a person, ask them, they may tell you” is also included. That is a precursor of the relatively recent development of narrative psychology.

Some of the ways of achieving a better understanding of a person’s ways of construing the world that have been developed since Kelly’s original work in 1955 are included, such as laddering and pyramiding together with the theory-based personal skills that are necessary to carry out these procedures.

This course consists of six Parts, each of which requires some practical work to be carried out. A tutor provides feedback on that work. As far as possible, practical work is carried out within the student’s work context. In addition, written answers to questions or short essays are sometimes required.

In all the six Parts the theoretical concepts and practical skills are introduced by Notes. Extensive use has been made of George Kelly’s chapter ‘A brief introduction to personal construct theory’ (2003) in these Notes. We feel that no one could give a better description of these sometimes complex ideas than the author himself.
Learning Objectives

By the end of this course on 'The Basics of Personal Construct Psychology and its Methods of Inquiry' a student will:

a) have knowledge of personal construct psychology as formally expressed in its Fundamental Postulate and the eleven corollaries that elaborate it; understand the relevance of the philosophy of constructive alternativism, have explored the nature of the theory's reflexivity and the central ideas of "the person-as-scientist" and that "all behaviour is an experiment"

b) have been introduced to concepts relating to emotion and change. These include threat, anxiety, guilt, hostility, levels of awareness and the Cycles of Experience, Creativity and Decision-Making (the CPC Cycle)

c) have explored the essential theoretical components of personal construct interviewing including "suspending" one's own value system, "subsuming" another's understanding of the world, and the notion of "credulous listening"

d) understand how theoretical knowledge is related to the practice of elicitation of constructs and the methods of inquiry - repertory grids and self characterisations

e) have gained practical experience of the following interviewing methods, some using audio material:

i) some methods of construct elicitation

ii) laddering

iii) pyramiding
Details of Coverage

Part I provides an overview of the philosophy of constructive alternativism, which has been elaborated into the current interest in constructivism. Central features of personal construct theory covered here are its Fundamental Postulate and the corollaries of construction and individuality.

Also explained is Kelly’s model of the person-as-scientist and, stemming from that model, his revolutionary idea that ‘all behaviour can be viewed as an experiment’.

Lastly, the very important concept of reflexivity is introduced. ‘Reflexivity’ is central to personal construct theory as it states that the theory can be used to understand the behaviour of the personal construct practitioner, just as much as it can be used to understand others.

Practical work includes the student personally carrying out the triadic elicitation of personal constructs and writing a self characterisation. Other than the reading provided in the Notes relating to all the above, reading is required from the provided course text. In addition, George Kelly’s chapter on ‘Behaviour is an experiment’ is also provided.

Part 2 describes the skills of credulous listening, suspending your own construing system and subsuming the construing system of the person with whom you are working. This Part also includes a description of and practical work in using the methods of construct elicitation known as laddering and pyramiding.

The corollaries of sociality, organisation and dichotomy are discussed in relation to these skills. An audio recording is provided giving examples of the skills of laddering.

Part 3 focuses on the nature and design of repertory grids and the practical work includes the construction and administration of a ratings form of grid to another person.

The corollaries described in relation to this are those of range, commonality and experience.

Apart from the Notes and specified reading in the course text, reading material includes the paper 'What is a personal construct?'

Part 4 covers ways in which the information extracted from a grid can be analysed. One way is by 'eyeballing' the raw data as much can be learned from that. Another way is by studying a plot of
the data provided by a principal components analysis. These are carried out using the grid you created in Part 3 of the course. The design and use of repertory grids with groups of people is also discussed.

The fragmentation corollary is the theory that is included in Part 4 of the course.

Part 5 is concerned mainly with Dennis Hinkle’s elaboration of Kelly’s theory. In this work he describes the Implications Grid to test aspects of his theory. Discussion includes Fransella’s use of Hinkle’s work to provide a theoretical account to test the personal construct assumption that behaviour and construing are inextricably linked. Practical work involves the completion of Fransella’s modification of Hinkle’s grid - the Bi-Polar Implications Grid.

Also here is a discussion of the analysis of self characterisations, first described in Part 1. Practical work on this is to ask two people to complete a self characterisation and to provide an analysis of these. Reading material includes the chapter entitled ‘Nature babbling to herself’ that describes one person’s use of writing self characterisations.

The theory examined in this Part is the Choice corollary.

Part 6 focuses on Hinkle’s Resistance to Change Grid; the personal construct approach to non-verbal construing and to emotion, which specifically relates to threat, hostility, guilt and anxiety. The personal construct Cycles of Change are also discussed. These Cycles are:

- Creativity

- Decision-Making (the CPC cycle)

- Experience

The remaining corollary of Modulation is covered in this Part of the course and the practical work consists of the administration and scoring of a Resistance to Change Grid. The student is also asked to write a short self-referencing essay. Reading includes a theoretical chapter on ‘The concept of resistance’.

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Other Matters

This course is not accredited by the University. When a course offered by the University is ‘not accredited’ this means that the course does not attract a specified number of academic credits which could be counted towards a degree or other award of the University. However, the academic standard of the course and hence its quality, is assured by the University and that is verified by the fact that a certificate of completion will be issued formally by the University upon satisfactory completion of the course. Please see the Terms and Conditions on which the course is offered to see what constitutes satisfactory completion of the course.

Unless otherwise agreed in writing, the course must be completed within an eight-month period. If you have not completed the course within that time, you will be sent the materials for the remaining Parts of the course and if you wish to submit course work for feedback, there will be an additional fee. For more details please see below under “Costs” and please also refer to the terms and conditions for this course, which can be downloaded from the website or emailed to you on request.

The course text is *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* (2004) (2nd edition) by Fay Fransella, Richard Bell and Don Bannister and this book is included in the course fee. Also provided is a video giving an introduction to personal construct psychology by Fay Fransella to be used throughout the course, plus audio material with space for the student's practical work recordings.

The sequence of study is organised so that the student can start applying their knowledge as soon as possible.
Costs

Fee for the course is £650. Fees are payable in £ Sterling and must be paid in full prior to the start of the course.

If you have not completed the course within 8 months and you wish to receive tuition on those Parts of the course that you have yet to complete, an additional fee in accordance with the following scale will be payable:

Number of Parts of the Course uncompleted:

1 Part - Additional fee payable = £50
2 Parts - Additional fee payable = £100
3 Parts - Additional fee payable = £150
4 Parts - Additional fee payable = £200
5 Parts - Additional fee payable = £250
6 Parts - Additional fee payable = £300

To download full details of the terms and conditions on which this course is offered and to download an application form, please visit:

http://www.psy.herts.ac.uk/cpcp/courses.html

Important Note:

All courses offered by the Centre are kept under review and the detailed content of courses may change.