



EFPTA Newsletter January 2008

Editor's Note.

This issue of the Newsletter focuses on the conference held in Bologna, Italy, in November 9-11 2008, bringing summaries of the various lectures.

First Jari, President of EFPTA, writes about the new constitution of EFPTA, secondly Dorothy Coombs, Vice President of EFPTA, also gives information about the new constitution and the Bologna conference, and thirdly there is a notice by Joe Cocker about the Cardiff seminar in April 2008. After these follow summaries of the various lectures held in Bologna. I would like to point out that as most of the lectures were held in Italian, followed by an English interpretation, it has been an additional challenge to write these summaries. The last contribution is a book review made by Dorothy Coombs.

I want to thank all those who have contributed to this issue of the Newsletter.

Annette Priskorn, editor, priskorn@hotmail.com

A New Constitution

In the beginning of November we had a conference in Italy. Carlo Brandini had made an excellent job organizing it in his school in Bologna. The conference started on Friday morning and lasted a whole day. Saturday we had a full day board meeting.

We heard interesting lectures from different fields of psychology, for example. 'Text analysis applied to psychology teaching'. In the afternoon we had workshops. In my workshop we shared experiences with colleagues and of course talked about teaching of psychology in Italy. The day was excellent, but the only problem seen from my point of view was that everything was spoken in both Italian and English. That took a little extra time, but I know that it was necessary because most participants were from Italy.

Our Federation has grown a lot, and now it's time to achieve an official status. On the Saturday we had a final board meeting in its current form for we have changed our constitution, and now we have an Executive Council and an Executive Board. The Executive Board is a small group that takes care of routine work between meetings, which take place at least twice a year. It has five members: the President, two Vice Presidents, a Treasurer and a Secretary. The Executive Council is

almost the same as our Board used to be. There is one representative from each country and the Executive Council has meetings at least once a year. Of course the members of the Executive Board are also members of the Executive Council.

The General Assembly has the greatest power within EFPTA . It has meetings every second year. The next General Assembly will be in November 2008. And from now on we have to take care of more formalities than before. The next meeting will be in Cardiff. Joe Cocker will organize the next seminar in Wales in April. There we will make an activity plan, the annual report and other things necessary for the General Assembly. When everything is ready, we will send the relevant documents to our member associations at least six weeks before the General Assembly. Then members have enough time to check things before the meeting. These formal changes and the registration will give us more power and official status in Europe.

Hong Kong the 25th of December 2007

Jari Honkala
President
EFPTA

European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations (EFPTA) Board meeting in Bologna, Italy. November 10th 2007.

The European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations (EFPTA) was established in March 2004 and, though it has had a draft constitution from the start, it has not been registered officially. To do this it must be registered in a European country and it has been decided that this will be done in Finland. The President, Jari Honkala, proposed that some fairly major changes should be made to the constitution and this was the main focus of the board meeting in Bologna. The minutes and other details can be seen on the web-site www.efpta.org. Carlo Prandini, our man in Bologna, organised accommodation for us in a "Superior" University hall of residence where the board meeting could be held, and he linked this to a one-day event that was being held for Psychology teachers in Italy on Friday 9th November. As usual we adopted a fair balance of work and "play" and we enjoyed a tour of the beautiful city of Bologna, as well as the excellent food and wine! Our sincere thanks go to Carlo and his team for looking after us so well.

The board of EFPTA currently consists of representatives from the UK (including Wales and Northern Ireland), Scotland, Germany, Holland, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Spain and Denmark, and until now the board meetings have been full day affairs, attended by all of them, Our new structure should allow for this to be streamlined to make decision-making more efficient. There will be an Executive Board, an Executive Council and a General Assembly made up of representatives of all member associations. It is hoped that during 2008 we will be able to attract members from other European countries where Psychology is taught at pre-degree level.

The next EFPTA conference is provisionally planned for the weekend of April 11-12 in Cardiff. Any teacher in a member Association, or individual EFPTA member, will be welcome to attend and details will be available on both web-sites as soon as the date and venue have been confirmed.

It is hoped that the October 2008 event will be held in Tallin, Estonia, and that we may be in Norway in April 2009. Watch this space!

If you are interested in making European links I am happy to help. Just send me an e-mail. If you already have established links I would be very interested to know what they are as we are trying to compile an inventory of what is going on across Europe. We are particularly keen to contact members who are involved in delivering the International Baccalaureate.

Dorothy Coombs, Vice President of the European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations.

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CARDIFF

FRIDAY APRIL 11th and SATURDAY APRIL 12th 2008

The next board meeting will be held in Cardiff, Wales.

In addition to the board meeting this will be an opportunity to

Meet psychology teachers from other countries including -

Iceland, Denmark, UK, Finland, Estonia, Spain, Netherlands, Germany and Italy.

sessions and workshops are planned on

- The work of the European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations - EFPTA
- Accessing European Funding for projects
- Teaching Psychology in the Welsh Language
- Psychology Teaching at Secondary Level in Europe
- Suggestions for projects involving two or more countries
- The autumn 2008 Psychology Teachers' Conference in Tallinn, Estonia.
- Teaching Psychology on the International Baccalaureate

Details are **provisional** at this stage. To receive further information please email me joe.cocker@ukonline.co.uk putting "**cardiff**" in the subject line.

Joe Cocker, a founder member of EFPTA

Theories of embodied and situated knowledge: implications for didactics

A lecture held by Anna Borghi, University of Bologna

Anna Borghi is an associate professor in Psychology at the University of Bologna. Her main area of research is embodied cognition and the interaction between knowledge and perception and action. She works on the relationships between object concepts and action, the role of affordances in categorization and the grounding of language in sensorimotor processes.

The general idea that cognition is embodied and situated means that cognition depends on the experiences that result from having a body with given physical characteristics and a particular sensorimotor system, and thus mental processes cannot be studied independently of the context in which they are used and without considering that they occur in time and that they adapt. In this “embodied” understanding concepts are multimodal and dynamic, not abstract, amodal and stable as in the traditional view. They are organized around situations, are not just hierarchical taxonomies.

An important item in her contribution was the concept of affordances which means “action possibilities” (Gibson 1979) that lie in the object as well as in the perceiving individual, thus they are variable dependent on capabilities and previous experiences of the individual. In experiments it was shown that seeing an object is not restricted to just understanding what it is, at the same time it also activates motor information and potentializes affordances related to past experiences with that object.

As a result for didactics: In the teaching process it is important to have good affordances in the environment that are embedded with a context (e.g. simulations) that allows the building of experience and knowledge (= situated learning).

And if information on objects is then stored in terms of action to perform with them, comprehending words referring to objects (the abstract symbols) can activate the motor system in the same way as actually interacting with objects.

by Renate Schrempf, Germany

A Brief History of the Psychological Disciplines in Italy

Based on a transcript of Stefania Stefanini’s lecture

The scientific psychology in Italy

The origin of scientific psychology in Italy can be traced back to about 1870. There were lots of obstacles the next hundred years, but since 1970 research and interest in psychology has peaked. The first courses for a degree in psychology were created in Rome and Padua in 1971, and the first Italian review of psychology in English *The Italian Journal of Psychology* was born in 1973.

From a scientific viewpoint the most important element is the effect of cognitivism in Italian research. The starting point of the Italian cognitivists is probably psycholinguistics. There is also a renovation within social psychology, above all in language and communication and non-verbal languages.

The practical application of psychology

The institutional increase of the discipline was caused by cultural factors and also by the strong expansion of psychologists.

The fascist period sees a development of practical application of psychology. The regime showed a big hostility towards theoretical psychology, but it was interested in and gave a big encouragement to research about concrete applications of it, above all in industrial and military plans

At the end of the '60s there was an expansion of applied psychology because psychologists gradually dedicated their studies to applicative aspects. At the end of the '90s there were more than 30,000 psychologists

Some characteristics of the psychology programs for high schools

In the beginning the psychology programs were only pedagogic, but in the '70s, the programs got a psycho-social-pedagogic dimension. The courses of study have a duration of five years and, until 1997, gave a professional qualification to teach in primary schools. Their main characteristic is a plan of study typical of high schools where psychology is orientated towards relational, communicative, organizational, social and educational aspects.

In 1998 an experiment in Social Sciences in high school was started where psychology was less connected with pedagogy and more studied human and animal behaviour, their main aspects being the relationship between the individual and society. The subject studies the big topics about the nature of cognitive and affective processes, about how man builds his meaning and realities, about how history and culture contribute to form the mind.

In the high school courses psychology has more an educational approach, which means studying psychology from a synchronical and diachronical point of view. The operative aspects consist in the study of research methods within psychology, even if it is theoretical and prefers abstraction.

Harpa Hafsteinsdóttir, Iceland

Text analysis in psychology teaching at secondary level

lecture held by Giovanna Alcaro

Understanding or learning to understand written psychological texts is a special challenge for pupils and students: Most psychological articles are written in an academic style and using words which are not understandable for so-called "normal" people. The intellectual level of those papers is very often very abstract and makes the reading process very difficult. That's the reason why we speak about "didactical" writing and –focused on the creational, more artificial writing - about novels and stories, a main subject of the psychology of literature.

But there is a lack of an understanding of "didactics" based on common psychology, and it is clear that Giovanna Alcaro has used the practical experiences from the development of Italian psychology when teaching philosophy. She pointed out that the question has been whether philosophy texts differ from psychology texts when they are to be understood by the pupils. Pupils on the secondary level have difficulties reading and understanding scientific texts because of the

academic language, and Alcaro and her colleagues have found a new method in which some key qualifications or so-called fundamental elements can be useful for everybody when reading a scientific (in this case: philosophical) text. Giovanna Alcaro: *“The method gave us such great results that we decided to use it for psychology as well as other subjects!”*

No method without trying to estimate its effect. The interesting thing, Giovanna Alcaro pointed out, has been how efficiently (and more than in normal class teaching) group work could be combined with a few “keys”, which would be usable for all school-text-books: Alcaro: *“We wanted to guide students to develop a different and better process of learning such as making inferences, putting forward psychological questions, making comparisons.”*

However, the new method has its sources, which were mentioned by Giovanna Alcaro: The first one (silent and hidden applause from the author of this article) is Jerome Bruner and his cognitivist theory, which results in better teaching (and a better curriculum in my opinion) according to the mind of an expert’s work on “model learning” or imitational learning (*it’s a real question of didactics of psychology whether we shouldn’t follow the methods of research from Galileo Galilei or René Descartes or Leibniz or Wundt or William James*). One important point in this theory is the central terms, which Famiglietti and Alcaro call “keys”. We can follow and understand that in the cognitivist theory since Piaget and Bruner and followers the “semantic anchors” are the pivotal terms to understand, to associate imagination, performance and sense of a term: *A table is a table is a table! But what happens if you create the performance that the table at your side might be a bed? No problem if the context allows it (sleeping for a while on the office desk in the closed office may be understandable, but –look to the “Club of the dead poets” – what will happen when every pupil wants to sleep on his desk in his classroom because his imagination of interesting lessons would appear just only in his dreams while sleeping...)* This side of the medal has not been reported by Giovanna Alcaro, and she was right because the focus of her research was not on the semantic disparities, but on understanding “technical prose” as D. Kieras wrote about in *“A simulation of model for the comprehension of technical prose”*. In combination with Maria Famiglietti’s *Strumenti logico formativi per imparare a scrivere e a descrivere* Giovanna Alcaro recommends Famiglietti’s well-known didactical approach “Modelli Logici Method”.

What is the method like, and what is new? According to Bruner the teacher has to analyse many psychology text books which contain “nuclei fondanti” – the pivots of understanding. These identified pivots are terms of great importance (like key qualifications in education) because other things depend on them. This understanding has not changed during the last forty years, and the best way to learn is by associating terms with meaningful performances or imaginations. So the teacher has to explain the “technical” terms or “pivots” and has to help the students to combine and associate the different meanings. This was explained as the first step of the method.

The second step of the teaching method recommends the “mind mapping theory of mental representation” (like Paivio and Laird showed), and the teachers help the pupils to find a quantity of pivots (“keys”), which occur in several texts (by concentrating on these identified pivots during the reading process), and encourages them to combine and associate and avoid association of terms within a likely developing “mental or cognitive mind map”. *By the way: You can achieve the same from the other direction when you follow the argumentation of William James about how he ranked the principle questions of psychology (for example: What can you observe? Can you compare it with other phenomena? What is the same, what differs? What is fundamental? What seems to be general? etc...)*. But it doesn’t matter.

Giovanna Alcaro opened a discussion which lies in front of us: Why not prefer literary works by poets and story writers identifying the “key words” (pivots, like in Dostojewski, whom Freud called

the greatest psychologist of the 19th century) and improving their current interest instead of interpreting “didactic” terms? *Isn't the question by the old poet FROST's memento "When I was young" an archetypical question of all generations all over the world? And not only this question! But how to handle the questions of age diseases could be taught in "technical didactical" books representing the psychological theories of aging or by showing how old people all over the world overcome the problems of aging. This will be still more necessary because of our aging society.* Giovanna Alcaro's method leads directly to practise, and for this we have to thank her very much. She intends to make a table or a matrix in which will be found skills, therapy, results, advantages, limitations, assumptions (idea of illness, idea of mankind) in the vertical line and the different understandings and theories according to these (key-)terms or pivots in the horizontal line. According to the framework in which all European teachers of psychology will have to work together within the Bologna Process all efforts have to be done to find a way to improve a common understanding of scientific language. This is happening in congresses for scientists and researchers, like the World Congress of Psychology in Berlin 2008: They will understand on the foreign language level, but they will (and isn't that science?) discuss and debate and defend their ideas and their different understandings from which they receive meaning: That makes sense – if you believe in science! But according to Giovanna Alcaro's little steps into the “universe of philosophical and psychological *technical* terms or pivots” she will be nearer to the world of adolescents than the scientists – and we together with her: Didactical reduction may be a “key word” for better understanding in the world, for better teaching methods and more success in the classroom – perhaps the pivot of teaching of psychology everywhere. Didactic pivots are something which we should discuss in and out of EFPTA. Many thanks, Giovanna!

Udo Kittler, University of Dortmund

“The Other Sister” by S.T. Underdahl

Published by Flux.

ISBN: 978-0-7387-0933-8 (\$8.95)

As a teacher of Psychology and “twice step-mum” to four grown up children, I have always been fascinated by the nature v nurture debate, and this book appealed to me for a number of reasons. It tells the story of a 16 year old girl who discovers that she has an older sister and, as if that was not enough, a sister who is highly talented. Her two brothers seem to be able to accept this new dynamic in the family, but Josey struggles to come to terms with the fact that she is no longer the only daughter.

The story tells us much about the importance of effective communication, and of being sensitive to the feelings of others. Josey could only see the situation from her own point of view, failing to appreciate the pain that the adoptive parents felt when her older sister decided to seek out her biological roots. It also reinforces the value of true friendship.

This book will appeal to young readers, many of whom may live in “unconventional” family situations, and in particular to anyone who has experience of adoption. The writer is a practicing psychologist and has first hand experience of birth-family reunions.

Dorothy Coombs