

## The things of life: a critical appreciation of Bernie Neville's contribution to person-centered psychology

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# The things of life: a critical appreciation of Bernie Neville's contribution to person-centered psychology

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## ABSTRACT

Bernie Neville (1938–2021) was a man of many parts, which, as far as his professional life was concerned, encompassed, in addition to a profound knowledge of person-centered psychology (PCP), cultural psychology, Jungian/analytic psychology and process philosophy. Indeed, his writing on PCP reveals all these influences and, thus, his integral approach to thinking about therapy and life. This article identifies these influences in his contributions to the person-centered literature, as well as five specific areas of his contribution to PCP, that is, regarding groups; PCP and education; the development of two of Rogers' (1957, 1959) conditions of therapy; PCP and ecopsychology; and, finally, the substantiation of the work of Carl Rogers by the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead. In offering a critical appreciation of Neville's work, the article suggests that his contributions to PCP were ahead of his time, and still offer challenges to its theory and practice.

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## Introduction

Bernie Neville was a key figure in the development of person-centered psychology (PCP), both internationally as well as in his homeland of Australia (see Barrett-Lennard & Neville, 2010), to which, in addition to his consistent presence at international conferences, fora and cross-cultural encounter groups, he contributed some 22 publications, including two books. Based on a memorial lecture delivered in his honor (Tudor, 2023), this article identifies and discusses five specific areas of his contribution to PCP. While written as an academic journal article, it retains some of the direct style of the original lecture, including referring to Bernie Neville as 'Bernie'.

Before offering – and, indeed, as a way of locating this critical appreciation of Bernie's contribution – especially for those who did or do not know much about the person or his life, I include a brief biographical sketch.

## Bernie Neville

Bernie Neville began his professional career in 1959 when, as a De La Salle Brother, he taught English, languages and history at St Michael's College, Beverley/Henley Beach,

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South Australia. It was there that he was first asked to be a school counselor and 'discovered' the work of Carl Rogers. He moved in 1968 to Benilde High School, Bankstown, New South Wales, and, in 1970, to St Joseph's College, Fitzroy North, Victoria. Having left the Lasallian brotherhood to marry and have a family, he became an academic, at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria (1972–2011), a counselor, and author, with a deep interest and presence in person-centered psychology, Jungian psychology, and process philosophy. In 1995, Bernie established a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Counseling and Human Services, designed specifically for non-psychologists. Both these programs and the Master's degree which was to follow were able to remain firmly rooted in humanistic–existential theory, with a strong Rogerian orientation, in itself a significant contribution to the development of counseling education/training in Australia. After retiring from La Trobe University, he became an Honorary Professor at Swinburne University of Technology, and a Professor of Holistic Counseling at the Phoenix Institute of Australia, both of which are also located in Melbourne where Bernie lived. Bernie taught, researched, wrote and consulted widely on educational practice, communication and organizational change for over 30 years.

Together with Godfrey (Goff) Barrett-Lennard, a fellow Australian who had studied with Carl Rogers in Chicago (1954–1958), Bernie promoted person-centered counseling in Australia, for details of the history of which, see Barrett-Lennard and Neville (2010). Bernie was a regular attendee and participant at the biennial international conferences of the World Association of Person-centered & Experiential Psychotherapy & Counseling, at the last of which he attended (PCE2028) in Vienna, he gave what was to be his last keynote speech (Neville, 2028).

### Critical appreciation

The phrase 'critical appreciation' in the title of both the original lecture (on which this article is based), and this article describes both my intellectual relationship with Bernie, and the methodology I have adopted in reviewing his contributions. I deeply appreciated his work, and, thinking about it in terms of a taxonomy of educational objectives (Bloom et al., 1956) (an application which would have amused him): the astonishing breadth and depth of his knowledge and comprehension of a number of subject areas; his skillful application of this understanding to and in practice; and his critical and creative evaluation and synthesis of ideas. He had a fine mind – or, as we shall see, a number of minds; and was, as his daughter, Alisoun Neville, put it: 'a magician of the mind' (A. Neville, 2024, p. xi). At the same time, I disagreed with some of his representation of Rogerian and person-centered theory, but was able to do so directly, robustly and respectfully – qualities that Bernie both embodied and engendered. Ever the educator, he was always more interested in asking questions which 'drew out' the student or interlocutor (educare = to draw out) than in scoring points in a debate, or in being right.

Elsewhere, I have identified and elaborated the four major theoretical or intellectual influences (PCP, cultural psychology, Jungian/analytic psychology and process philosophy) that Bernie brought to bear on four main subject areas in which Bernie made substantial contributions, that is, education, research, groups and organizations and the ecological (Tudor, 2023). Here, I focus on this analysis specifically with regard to Bernie's person-centered publications (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Bernie Neville's person-centered publications: a conceptual analysis.

Publications	Areas of contribution					Theoretical influences and contributions			
	Education	Research	Groups and organisations	Ecological	Other	Person-centered psychology	Cultural psychology	Jungian/analytic psychology	Process philosophy
The measurement of group climate (Neville, 1971)			x			x			
<i>Group climate</i> (Neville, 1976)		x				x			
Interpersonal functioning and learning in the small group (B. W. Neville, 1978)			x			x			
Carlhuff, Maslow and interpersonal perception in small groups (Neville, 1983)						x			
The person-centred approach to classroom discipline (Neville, 1991)	x					x			
Rogers, Jung und der Postmoderne (Rogers, Jung and the postmodern) (Neville, 1992)					x	x		x	
Five kinds of empathy (Neville, 1996b) <sup>a</sup>					x	x	x	x	
The client-centered ecopsychologist (Neville, 1999) <sup>b</sup>				x		x		x	
Reconnecting with Gaia (Neville, 2005)				x		x			x
What kind of universe? (Neville, 2007)				x		x			x
Reflections on person-centred classroom discipline (Neville, 2008)	x					x			
The person-centered scene in Australia (Barrett-Lennard & Neville, 2010)					x	x			
Teaching and transformation (Neville, 2011)	x					x		x	
<i>The Life of Things</i> (Neville, 2012) (Second edition published 2013)				x		x	x	x	x
Person-centered teacher advocates (McCann & Neville, 2013)	x					x	x		
Anxiously congruent: Congruently anxious (Neville, 2013a)				x		x		x	
Setting therapy free (Neville, 2013c)				x		x			x
L'enchevêtrement thérapeutique [Therapeutic entanglement] (Neville, 2014)				x		x			
Taking Rogers seriously (Neville, 2018)					x	x			x
<i>Eco-centred Therapy</i> (Neville & Tudor, 2024)				x		x	x	x	x

<sup>a</sup>Bernie published this paper a volume of papers published from the Gmunden Conference (Hutterer et al., 1996), and in an Australian journal (Neville, 2013b).

<sup>b</sup>Bernie had published the same paper under the slightly altered title, 'The person-centred ecopsychologist' in a German journal (though in English) two years earlier (Neville, 1997).

Altogether, Bernie published 22 outputs on PCP, comprising 12 journal articles (Barrett-Lennard & Neville, 2010; McCann & Neville, 2013; Neville, 1978, 1983, 1997, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2013b, 2013c, 2014); a dissertation (Neville, 1976); six chapters (Neville, 1971, 1991, 1992, 1996b, 2005, 2008); two books (Neville, 2012; Neville & Tudor, 2024); and his last conference presentation, which is available as a DVD (Neville, 2018) and also published in Neville and Tudor (2024). Table 1 represents these, while avoiding duplications (as noted).

This Table shows in Bernie's writing in and on PCP, not only his increasing interest in the ecological area of life but also his increased integration of all of his theoretical influences.

Having provided a brief introduction to Bernie's influences, I now turn to the substance of Bernie's contribution to person-centered psychology.

## Person-centered psychology

Table 1 identifies some 22 contributions Bernie made to the person-centered literature principally in five areas. These are (in chronological order): his work on groups; his reflections on the interface between the person-centered approach and education; his development of two of Rogers' (1957, 1959) conditions of therapy; his thinking about person-centered psychology and ecopsychology; and, finally, his bringing together of the work of Carl Rogers, the founder of person-centered psychology, and Alfred North Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy. In discussing Bernie's contributions in these areas, I have also prioritized his own work, though I do want to acknowledge his coauthored work, not least an excellent article on person-centered teacher advocates that he wrote in 2013 with Tricia McCann (McCann & Neville, 2013), and his encouragement of others to write and publish through his co-authorship and especially his co-editorship of five books: *Qualitative Research In Adult Education* (Neville & Willis, 1994), *Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education* (Willis & Neville, 1996), *New Learning Technologies: A Challenge for Teachers* (Ling et al., 1999), *Towards Re-Enchantment: Education, Imagination and the Getting of Wisdom* (Heywood et al., 2005), and *As Others see us: The Values Debate in Australia* (D'Cruz et al., 2008).

## Groups

Bernie's interest in groups dates back to an early chapter on the subject (Neville, 1971), his doctoral thesis (Neville, 1976) and three articles published from that thesis (B. W. Neville, 1983, 1978), as well as another, shorter article published in *Good Practice*, the journal of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (Neville, 1990) (which, unfortunately, is not available online). Here, I briefly refer to his thesis and the published articles that are accessible.

His doctoral thesis – on *Group Climate, Interpersonal Functioning and Learning* (Neville, 1976) – represents a major piece of research which takes the form of a correlation analysis of rating scales administered to the experimental population, that is, members of 13 learning groups (involving 123 participants) who were graduate students engaged in the study of interpersonal processes, followed by a replication study with an independent population of members of seven encounter or personal growth groups (involving a further 87 participants). The focus of the research was broadly inspired by Rogers'

(1957, 1959) theory of the conditions of therapeutic change but, more specifically, on Robert Carkhuff's model of human effectiveness and interpersonal functioning which was based on the postulate that, according to Carkhuff (1969), 'all effectiveness and interpersonal processes share a common core of conditions conducive to facilitate human experience' (p. 7). Bringing his own profoundly perspective to person-centered therapy, Bernie was particularly interested in the degree to which group participants experienced *each other* as facilitative and helpful. The thesis is a tour de force which shows Bernie as an assiduous researcher in the field of psychology (although his doctorate was in education), and one that would stand up well to contemporary scrutiny by the most empirical psychologist. At 800 pages over two volumes, it is a huge piece of work – and at nearly 4.5 kilos is a weighty tome! Bernie's conclusion was that 'in small learning groups there is an association between a group member's communication of the facilitative and action-oriented conditions and his [sic] contribution to the learning of other group members' (Neville, 1978, p. 360). In a second article published from the research (Neville, 1983), Bernie considers the more theoretical implications of the similarities and differences between Carkhuff's (1969) model of functioning and that of Maslow (1968) on which the research is based.

My only criticism of this work is based on what I consider to be Bernie's over-reliance on Carkhuff's (1969) model of helping conditions as distinct from Rogers' (1957, 1959) original theory. While Rogers identified six necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic change – i.e. the psychological contact between client and therapist; the client's incongruence; the therapist's congruence, genuineness or authenticity, unconditional positive regard, acceptance, or respect, and empathic understanding; and finally but most importantly, the client's experience and/or perception of the previous two conditions – Carkhuff and his colleague Charles Truax (C. B. Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) focused on just three of them: the therapist's congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy (the so-called 'core conditions'). Moreover, following Carkhuff's (1969) focus on the action-orientation dimension of interpersonal functioning and helping, i.e. concreteness and confrontation, as well as the facilitative dimensions (or conditions) of empathy and respect, Bernie's study focuses on these four dimensions. So, as a study of Carkhuff's theory, the thesis is consistent, and addresses the gap in research of Carkhuff's action-oriented dimensions in education, and as such is very thorough. I just wish it had been more Rogerian! Interestingly enough, in an article published 20 years after his doctoral thesis, Bernie refers critically to Carkhuff's (1969) writing as 'manifestly hero-literature' (Neville, 1999, p. 63), and to the models of C. Truax (1967), Carkhuff (1969) and Egan (1980) as Promethean (an analysis of his to which I return later).

Although we did not discuss his thesis in any detail – I'm not sure he'd even kept a copy! – Bernie and I did discuss Rogers' conditions in some detail, and I am delighted to say that we were in total agreement that we would represent them all in the book we wrote together (Neville & Tudor, 2024) – which we did, I think, in quite a creative way, and, following his death, with the help of Len Gillman, a New Zealand colleague, and of Alisoun – to both of whom, I am most grateful.

While Bernie's theoretical interest in groups developed into more of an interest in groups in organizations and in organizations themselves (e.g. Neville, 2004; Neville & Dalmau, 2008), I witnessed his continuing interest in groups in the form of his strong commitment to person-centered encounter groups (Rogers, 1970/1973). As Ross Crisp,

a local person-centered colleague, put it in his appreciation of Bernie (which is included in the book): 'In encounter groups, I observed his gift for self-disclosure that conveyed his humanity and genuineness, and which was at the same time apposite to the often controversial topics being discussed by other participants' (Crisp in Tudor, 2024, p. 196).

## The person-centered approach to education

Here, I am going to touch on two of Bernie's papers: the first his reflections on person-centered classroom discipline (Neville, 2008), and the second his ideas on teaching and transformation (Neville, 2011). Both reveal his passion for teaching – or, more accurately, education; his vast experience; his profound commitment to and focus on students; his humanity and, as he also discusses his failures, his humility.

The stimulus and provocation for the first paper was a chapter in a then popular book for newly graduated teachers by Sue Cowley (2003). Some 17 years earlier, Bernie had published a chapter on classroom discipline (Neville, 1991), and he used the publication of Cowley's book as an opportunity to update his ideas. He begins his revised chapter with a critique of the view that teaching is largely a matter of management and makes the point that, while, 'In [the] literature there is a good deal of discussion of "problem children", however they are labeled . . . [t]here is far less discussion of 'problem schools', 'problem classrooms' and 'problem teachers' (p. 153). He goes on to critique Cowley's minimal reference to teachers' empathy for students in 23 pages of behavior management, and that framed in terms of encouraging the teacher to achieve some objectivity rather than subjectivity about the pupil or student. Commenting on another author's argument that teachers should 'select' a philosophy so that there is a fit between the teacher and their philosophy (Burden, 2006), Bernie unpicks this argument beautifully: 'However', he says, 'there is also an assumption that a philosophy of teaching grounded in an authoritarian ideology has the same legitimacy as one grounded in an egalitarian and democratic ideology', commenting that: 'This second assumption is not an assumption that I share' (p. 154)! As I was reading this chapter, I assumed that Bernie would go to apply Rogers (1969, 1983) ideas about *education* to classroom discipline, based on, as Rogers put, the freedom to learn – but, no! Surprisingly but creatively, Bernie draws on Rogers' (1951) theory of personality and behavior theory to describe the student (and a specific student, David) in the context of the classroom and the school. It is an astonishing piece of work that not only brings what is generally considered to be quite a dense piece of Rogers' theory to life, but also offers a unique, clear and useful analysis of a learning person: an organism in their environmental context. As Bernie himself concludes:

Rogers' ideas are commonly dismissed as naive and romantic, yet when I try to carry them into my interaction with David I find nothing soft-headed about them. Rather they demand a considerable clarity of thought and toughness of purpose, resilience of my own self-concept, and a heroic respect for the autonomy of the individual. The person-centered approach has nothing to do with *laissez faire* (McKeachie, 1958). While I attempt to understand why David acts the way he does, I do not approve of his behavior, or even honestly have a neutral attitude towards it. I wish to change it, or rather, I wish to provide the conditions under which David will himself choose to change it. (Neville, 2008, p. 160)

The second paper (Neville, 2011), which also has a reflective quality, does not draw so much on person-centered theory, but was published in *The Person-Centered Journal* and, therefore, aimed at a person-centered audience. In it, Bernie offers some useful distinctions between imitation and individuation in learning, and between incremental and transformative learning. In the context of discussing the first distinction, Bernie makes a pertinent point about an important but largely unacknowledged paradox in teaching or facilitation:

Even when we are committed to the notion of helping students to find their own ideas and attitudes instead of uncritically accepting ours, when we see ourselves as facilitators rather than instructors, we are still wanting them to share this particular skill (critical thinking) and value (the acknowledgment of people's right to be themselves) that are important to us. We are still, paradoxically, trying to make them a little more like us. (p. 37)

I think this is another great example of Bernie's ability to go that step further and encourage us – in this case, person-centered educators – to think that bit more reflexively, critically, and, ultimately, paradigmatically. In the article, Bernie uses the image of an onion to represent a model of multilayered learning (which he considers involves training, instruction, modeling, telling stories, teaching from experience, coaching, facilitation, and collaborative exploration), all of which are all designed to draw out students' knowledge at the different layers of: skills and behaviors; information, ideas, and beliefs; values and attitudes; and basic convictions and assumptions. Bernie makes two important points about the significance of these layers. The first is that:

it seems that it is the lower levels that control the whole structure. Each layer expresses the layer below it. We make certain unreflected assumptions about who we are and what the world is like; these assumptions are reflected in our value systems, in our tendency to see some things as better and more important than others; these values are expressed in our beliefs, ideas, and opinions, the thoughts we have about the world; finally, our thoughts and opinions find expression in the things we do and say. The surface layers can change to some extent (we learn some things and forget others) without affecting the deeper layers. On the other hand, change in the deeper layers generates change all the way through. (Neville, 2011, p. 43)

I consider this also a useful model for therapy which I view as a clinical (form of) philosophy (Tudor & Worrall, 2006), one of the many things about which Bernie and I agreed.

The second point is that, as Bernie puts it, 'it seems that while the surface layers can change readily enough as long as the deeper layers are not affected, learning that involves change in the deeper levels is strongly resisted' (Neville, 2011, p. 43). Again I agree with Bernie, and consider that this also explains people's resistance to change in social, political and cultural spheres.

I have one criticism of this article which I would love to have discussed with Bernie, which is that he omits from his summary of Rogers' (1963) concept of the actualizing tendency – which is concerned with the maintenance, enhancement *and reproduction* of the experiencing organism – the third quality or dynamic of reproduction. In the context of his paper, I would frame 'reproduction' as that of the self through education.

## Rogers' conditions of therapy

Discussing Bernie's contribution to groups and person-centered group theory, I referred earlier to his doctoral research project in which he investigated two of Rogers' facilitative dimensions (or conditions) of respect (unconditional positive regard) and empathy. Elsewhere, Bernie contributed two papers to the ongoing discussion of and literature regarding Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change (Rogers, 1957).

To the first, a chapter on empathy (Neville, 1996b), based on a paper presented at the third International Conference on Client-centered and Experiential Psychotherapy in Gmunden, Austria, Bernie brings his close reading of Gebser's (1983) cultural philosophy and, specifically, his work on the evolution of consciousness. Gebser identified five stages or mutations of consciousness – from the archaic, through the magical, mythical and mental-rational, to the integral – which Bernie links to different ideas about the mind and applies to the relationship between therapist and client, illustrating it with reference to Rogers' theory and clinical practice. Bernie's original paper is literally mind-blowing in that it proposes that we operate on the basis of having not one but five minds. Unfortunately, due to the limited circulation of the original book, this paper is not widely known, but, I am glad to say that an updated version, together with some of my own work on empathy, appears in the book *Eco-centred Therapy* (Neville & Tudor, 2024), which includes a beautiful illustration of an experience of being in these five minds that Bernie had at a conference on 'Soul in Education' held in Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia.

To the second paper on congruence (Neville, 2013a), Bernie again brings his fine mind – or, at least one of them (I would say, his mental-rational one) – to another of Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions. In his original formulations, Rogers (1957, 1959) postulates that the client is incongruent by virtue of being vulnerable or anxious. Although Rogers does not state that health or cure consists of an absence of vulnerability or anxiety, it is something of a gap in the theory. Bernie takes on this ambiguity by arguing, as he acknowledges the existential philosophers have done, 'that anxiety comes with being human' (p. 225). He continues: 'They [the existential philosophers] argue not only that we *should* be anxious, but that we *are* anxious, no matter what strategies we use to deny it' (p. 225, my emphasis); and then, Bernie delivers a masterstroke: 'If that is so, congruence involves embracing that anxiety and finding ways to live with it. Incongruence involves the denial, conscious or unconscious, of who we really are'. It is simple point and yet a profound one which, I think, contributes to a more person-centered view of the client as a whole person. In this paper (which would have been drafted at the time Bernie was writing his book on *The Life of Things*), there is a particularly passionate paragraph in which I think we can really hear Bernie's voice:

I suggest that anxiety is over-determined. Our individual, personal anxiety is not grounded merely in the circumstances of our personal, relational lives. We are anxious because of the kind of universe in which our lives are embedded. We are anxious because we are faced with the inevitability of death and responsibility for making choices in a universe which we cannot demonstrate to be meaningful. We are anxious because we belong to a species which is destroying its home and itself. We are anxious because we are cells of a suffering planet. We

might argue that the anxieties which arise from our inability to deal creatively with the peculiar circumstances of our lives have their source in these deeper layers of anxiety which we share with our culture and our species. (Neville, 2013a, p. 225)

Elsewhere in the paper Bernie writes about organismic anxiety – he and I were allies in acknowledging and reclaiming the person-centered psychology in organismic psychology (see Tudor, 2010; Tudor & Worrall, 2006) – and about ecocentric congruence, which echoes his earlier work on ecopsychology, to which I now turn.

### Person-centered psychology and ecopsychology

In 1997, Bernie published an article on ‘The person-centred ecopsychologist’ in the first issue of a journal called *Person*, a German-language journal, though the article was published in English (Neville, 1997). Two years later, he published a revised version under the slightly changed title, ‘The client-centered ecopsychologist’ in *The Person-Centered Review*, the journal of the Association for the Development of the Person-centered Approach (Neville, 1999). The second article (on which this appreciation is based) was ahead of its time and, I would say, still has contemporary relevance to and beyond person-centered psychology and psychologists. In it, Bernie not only advances his thesis – ‘that client-centred therapy and ecotherapy start from very different ways of imagining the place of individuals in the world’ (p. 59) – but also, again, invites the reader to think more deeply about the assumptions on which therapy, in this case, client- or person-centered therapy and its theory is based, and to understand the implications and challenges of taking an ecological view of the person-in-context. In and from an ecopsychological perspective, Bernie argues that ‘adequate human functioning demands a congruence not just between one’s behavior and one’s self-concept, or between one’s self-concept and one’s “real self”, but a congruence between self and Nature’ (p. 59). He continues by acknowledging that this approach ‘demands an expansion of the notions of “self” and “self realisation” not only to the species but to the whole of nonhuman reality’ (p. 69). Having laid down this challenge, he addresses it by offering a Jungian archetypal analysis of the fantasy of the many that underlies most (Western) psychological models of human life, which Bernie refers to as the Hero (or Promethean) fantasy – a word he equates with narrative, discourse and paradigm; and the fantasy of the oneness of all things that underlies most ecological perspectives, which Bernie refers to as the Mother (or Gaia) fantasy. He then applies this to psychology in general and different forms of therapy before turning his attention to client-centered therapy in which he sees both the Heroic (and egoic) fantasy as well as the Mother fantasy. Thus, while Rogers frames some of his key theory, especially in his 1959 paper on ‘A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centred framework’, in mechanistic and materialistic ‘scientific’ terms, Bernie acknowledges that ‘From the first [Rogers] preferred the Gaian language of biology [the organism, growth] to the Promethean language of mechanics [energy, structure] in discussing the “what” and the “how” of personal development’ (p. 62). In the second half of the paper, Bernie explores the Gaian tradition in Rogerian and person-centered psychology with reference to Rogers’ view of the formative tendency in the universe, and then develops it in terms of what he

refers to as ecocentric valuing, ecocentric empathy, and ecocentric congruence, though not in terms of ecocentric contact.

Looking back, this article is an early manifestation of Bernie's thinking in and about the psychological and ecological worlds, and about the world itself, which he went on to articulate in *The Life of Things* (Neville, 2012) and, together, he developed in his last book, which as its subtitle acknowledges, is specifically concerned with 'revisoning person-centred psychology for a living world' (Neville & Tudor, 2024).

## Person-centered psychology and process philosophy

For many years, Bernie was a student and proponent of the work of the mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, who, as Bernie summarizes it:

began his scientific career as a mathematical physicist and ended it as a philosopher trying to work out what sort of universe we are part of. He started with the notion that if the picture of the universe revealed by subatomic physics is an accurate one, the universe must be like that all the way through. Thus, there is no substance, only process; no things, only possibilities becoming events. (Neville, 2007, p. 275)

Whitehead's ideas are complex and challenging, and his writing is somewhat dense and often difficult to follow and to translate across into psychology and therapy. Bernie was able to do this and did so most thoroughly and accessibly in an article published in *Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapies* in 2007. I have a particular fondness for this article as I have also been influenced by Whitehead's process philosophy and, the previous year, had, with Mike Worrall, published a book on person-centered therapy in which we had made some connections between Whitehead and Rogers, though not as clearly as Bernie did the following year. In many ways, my book (with Worrall) and Bernie's article brought us together as we discovered that we shared a common intellectual heritage and ideas, especially regarding organismic psychology and philosophy. Although Rogers never directly quoted Whitehead in his work, there is some evidence of Whitehead's indirect influence on Rogers; and, in his article, Bernie identifies and elaborates these influences as well-specific connections between Whitehead's ideas and those of Rogers, most particularly with regard to the formative tendency, to which Rogers referred to in publications over nearly 30 years, as follows:

- '[T]he potent and orderly forces which are evident in this whole [therapeutic] experience, forces which seem deeply rooted in the universe as a whole' (Rogers, 1951, p. xi).
- '[T]he directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life – the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature – the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, or the self' (Rogers, 1954/1967c, p. 351).
- The basis on which the universe is alive and directional (Rogers, 1980).

Reflecting on this, Bernie asserts that:

One cannot be genuinely person-centered without accepting the notion of an actualizing tendency at the personal level. However, some person-centered counselors manage to carry on

without thinking twice about the formative tendency in the universe, a tendency which Rogers [1980] asserts is the other 'foundation block of the person-centered approach' (. . . p. 114). Some, indeed, are inclined to think that Rogers had 'lost it' when he started talking seriously about what he called the formative tendency . . . [but] They remain committed to a mechanistic cosmology which Rogers rejected. (p. 273)

Bernie then goes on to make some comments about Whitehead's ideas which support an organismic, process-oriented perspective on life (as distinct from a Cartesian – Newtonian perspective), including:

- That the universe consists of, as William James put it, 'drops of experience' not substances as is generally understood, or, put another way, of verbs rather than nouns. As Bernie put it in his keynote speech in Vienna:

In this understanding, the universe does not consist of 'things' at all, but of events. We are a succession of 'drops of experience', whilst the 'self' with which we are inclined to identify, is simply our recollection of our past moments of experience, a recollection which, of course, is part of our current moment of experience. (Neville, 2018)

- '[E]verything weprehend (see, hear, feel, touch, intuit, think about) is already in the past. Only *I* is in the present; *me* and my environment are in the past' (Neville, 2007, p. 276).
- Creativity is not a particular capacity that some people have and others do not; it is the center of human life and the cosmos.
- '[G]rowing is not something we do. It is not even something that happens to us. Rather, it is a cosmic event in which we participate' (Neville, 2007, p. 276).
- Each event and actual occasion is a subjective experience – a point that Bernie links to the significance and original radicalism of Rogers' theory of empathy which was based on the view that the best vantage point for understanding the client is from their (internal) frame of reference.
- 'Each of us in our moment of experience is connected to every other experiencing subject in the universe. Everything we do has an impact, however slight, on the whole universe. Not only is everything connected to everything but it only exists through its connectedness' (Neville, 2007, p. 278) – a point which Bernie links to ideas about relationship, including the therapeutic relationship. As he puts it:

When we look at the therapeutic interaction between counselor and client, we are inclined to see two individuals and imagine that there is a relationship of some sort between them. In Whitehead's view, we have it back to front. In each moment of experience it is the relationship which holds the two experiencing subjects in being, not two individuals who make a relationship happen. They are directly connected, as aspects of a single cosmic moment of experience. (p. 278)

- Process is the ultimately reality (Whitehead, 1929/1978) – which, as Bernie points out, is fundamental to Rogers' (1961/1967b), view of life and therapy: '*Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed.*' (Rogers, 1961/1967, p. 27; see also Rogers 1958/1967a).

As I have stated, I was close to Bernie in (t)his thinking about Whitehead and Rogers, and am profoundly grateful that I had and we made the opportunity to further this together both in conversations, and in our book.

## Summary

In summary, I would say that Bernie made an enormous contribution to the field of person-centered psychology in ways that were ahead of his time, the implications of which are highly challenging and some of which we are still only beginning to grasp. Bernie called the title of his last keynote speech 'Taking Rogers Seriously' (Neville, 2018). Although many people in and beyond the person-centered community respected and loved Bernie, I also think that his work has been somewhat underrated. In part, this may have been due to the fact that the organismic tradition of PCP which Bernie and others represented and furthered is less well-known, even within PCP and its various therapies, and is not presented within more populist accounts of the person-centered 'nation' and its approach (see, notably, Cooper, 2024). Re-reading some of Bernie's work with which I am familiar as well reading some of his work for the first time makes me realize that much of it is rich, layered, nuanced and radical and, in this sense, I would say that we also need to take *Bernie* seriously.

Indeed, at a time when, in education, certainly at the tertiary level, has largely moved away from leading or drawing out the student in favor of delivering material to fulfill pre-determined learning outcomes to customers who are encouraged to have a more consumerist view of acquiring knowledge, achieving grades and obtaining degrees, we need Bernie's radical, student-centered approach. At time when research, certainly in the therapeutic field is dominated by one – empirical – view of evidence, we need Bernie's rigorous investigation into subjective human experience and relationships between people. At a time when therapy is dominated by practice with individuals, we need Bernie's passion for groups and commitment to group encounter; and, at a time when therapy and life is dominated the egological, the self and the me, we need Bernie's deconstructive analysis and reconstructive thinking to help us restore an ecological perspective.

In this context, I am grateful that so much of Bernie's work is in the public domain and that people can continue to read his thinking. I am also grateful to the Ikon Institute of Australia for creating two (and hopefully more) events which will provide the opportunity for us to continue to continue to take Bernie's work seriously.

## Conclusion

In closing, I am all too aware that there is much about Bernie of which I have not spoken – his religious background, his love of languages, his politics, his generosity, his dry and wicked sense of humor, our relationship (some of which appears in the book) – and much more about Bernie of which I do not know.

In 1989, Bernie brought his ideas on education together in a book titled *Educating Psyche: Emotion, Imagination, and the Unconscious in Learning* (two subsequent editions of which were published in 2005 and 2014). In his Introduction to the first edition, Colin Wilson (1989) catches something of Bernie's spirit when he writes:

the most exciting thing about the book is not its conclusion, but the sparks [Neville's] mind throws off in such abundance in reaching them. Neville himself obviously possesses the peculiar genius of the educator to a very high degree. He shows us that the essence of education is becoming *excited* about ideas. (p. 11)

Those of us who were fortunate enough to know Bernie have our own experiences of the sparks of his mind and their impact on us – which, of course, are very much alive in the present and in and through us continue to create and enhance learning and life, the life of things, and, of course, the things – and relationships – that constitute life.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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