

Constructivism in Psychotherapy
50 minutes conversation with Robert Neimeyer
The Integrationist movement and Psychotherapy evolution

A.H.: Ok. Changing the topic into the integrationist movement, could you tell us about your perspective on what integration should be? You have suggested that *theoretical progressive integration* – you say and I’m quoting you – “that at the heart of this perspective is a concern with epistemological criteria for integration and the ideal candidate approaches for psychotherapy integration would be different models of therapy that show a strong convergence at core levels but considerable diversity at strategic levels”.

R.N.: Well, I would place that assertion of mine both in a place of my own development that was some time ago - almost twenty years ago – and I would also defend it as an approach among other possibilities. I wouldn’t see it is a pre-emptive possibility, the only way that integration should be pursued. It is to say that at theoretical and practical levels the borrowing from different perspectives can not be what we would call in English *hodgepodge* that is a kind of random integration. When we see this done, we see therapy is just become esthetical ugly and practically confusing to the participants. So if I’m eliciting the deep narrative, the structure of the deep context of your life and your core meanings and believes and then I take the advantage afforded by that deep disclosure – maybe of your spiritual believes and so on – in order to chastise you and dispute them empirically and so on, then one has shifted paradigms incoherently right? - From a kind of constructivist appreciation of your uniqueness to a kind of hegemonic stance of authority. And I think that those kinds of shifts where you would might move from a deep narrative procedure to a thought record that disputes its premises that would be an example of something that I would regard as an incoherent kind of integration. On the other hand there are many coherent ones, so that one might be working in a deep narrative way with an individual but embedding that person the context of his or her family, and understanding then - maybe through the use of Milan style circular questions - the way in which the positions of others on the story you’re telling may differ from your own and we might ask *whose story is most like Anibal’s? Whose’s as least like his?* And I would see this as a coherent integration because it respects the same premises about the - in some way - the personal priority of meaning. But also then looks at them as something that would be negotiated in social discourse, particularly within families or communities.

A.H.: Would you say that this progressive integration it is somehow happening around the models?

R.N.: Oh, who knows? I’ll leave that to wiser heads to judge than mine.

A.H.: Yes. In the recent years was there any positive signs in the field of psychotherapy that you would like to point out and negative ones?

R.N.: Well, let’s start with the bad news. I do think that - not only in US but also increasingly in Europe and it’s beginning to find expression, as well in eastern countries - we do have more and more and more domination of the training basis, at least in university settings and certainly at the research literature, more and more domination by a single perspective or one that has minor variations – and that is a cognitive-behavioural one with the intolerance that it often

shows for other perspectives. And I think that that's an unfortunate thing. I think that in the same way that we should be protecting biodiversity on the planet, on the same way that we should be respecting diversity among peoples and believes and the same way we want to support many forms of artistic expression and literature, in the same way that we want to support competing scientific theories that are pursuing similar objectives – in this way too we really should be looking to support novelty and diversity in psychotherapy and psychotherapy research. And I do fear that that goal is being subordinated to a kind of administrative role based orientation which is really predicated on economic concerns more than psychological ones, and I regret that. There are also, I think, many positive developments. There are lots of interesting approaches to therapy that continue to be developed and refined and I think that increasingly novel approaches to therapy are being tested with respect to identifiable forms of human distress and pain and found to make a useful contribution to those. I think that that's the very salutary positive development.