

HEATHER FOSTER

1943 – 2020

Heather was a mother of a daughter, a grandmother of three, and the loving companion of Chris Currey. Heather had struggled bravely with an incurable illness for many years and died on the 22nd of September 2020. Heather began her working life in the theatre as a dancer and later as a teacher of dance to children. Heather was employed with the Department of Education as a teacher of Communications for students at TAFE NSW. Driven by a strong sense of social justice, she was always there in both body and spirit providing extra assistance to disadvantaged young people.

As a single mother and a mature age student, Heather began her academic studies at the University of Wollongong and was awarded in 1983 a Bachelor of Arts with majors in Psychology, and the History and Philosophy of Science. The following year Heather was awarded first class honours degree in Psychology. In 1985 she was awarded a Commonwealth Post Graduate Scholarship to undertake her PhD studies. During the thirteen years from 1985 to 1998 her employment history was remarkable. Heather was employed in TAFE principal roles, responsible for introducing training programs, and coordinating the implementation of educational and vocational courses developed to further the educational potential of marginalized peoples.

At the same time, following the completion of her undergraduate studies, Heather began her PhD journey exploring the meanings of women anticipating or living with menopause. Her thesis was titled "Changing lives: a personal construct approach to menopause". Heather was awarded her PhD in 2003. In ground-breaking research,

Heather set out to test whether the provision of a brief intervention in the form of a menopause workshop could firstly reduce women's distressing emotions, such as anxiety and feelings of helplessness in relation to menopause, and secondly, increase women's feelings of control, hope, and positive feelings in relation to menopause. As a 'true' personal construct researcher Heather had her participants take on the role of co-researchers throughout the workshops. Also, Heather was very much committed to developing an intervention model that could meet the requirements of a professional working within women's health centers. To be able to do this Heather knew she needed to research the efficacy and effectiveness of a brief group intervention. Heather was able to provide evidence that three sessions of 1.5 hours each - a brief application of a personal construct approach - was helpful to women experiencing the menopausal transition, regardless of their levels of distress.

Following the awarding of her PhD, Heather continued investigating the meaning-making of women regarding menopause. From 2000 to 2007, Heather achieved six publications, her manuscripts further researching the construing of women experiencing menopause. During this time Heather also co-edited a book in 2006 titled "Personal Construct Psychology: New Ideas" along with Peter Caputi and Linda Viney. Heather impressed her co-editors with her intellectual curiosity, and her capacity to invest in the latest thinking, research, and ideas in PCP. Heather also touched them with her gentle but forthright approach demonstrating "a razor-sharp mind and the skill to communicate clearly" (Peter Caputi).

As time moved on Heather turned her attention to exploring visual meaning-making. The work of Tom Ravenette, and his use of contrasting picture-drawing in counselling, was an important contribution to her research design. Heather maintained it was “only the creator of an image (who) can elaborate the content, or the personal meanings of that particular image” (2012). Heather’s curiosity in the meaning-making of the author of visual images, such as the author of drawings and paintings, evolved into further research. This research resulted in a presentation of her findings at the 18th PCP Congress 2009 held in Venice, Italy.

Her presentation aroused considerable interest as an area of research with tremendous application. Are they the symbols that lie beyond the reach of words?

Her presentation was published “Using Contrasting Images to Explore Meanings within a Personal Construct Diagnostic Framework: Some Meanings of Being an Artist” in 2012. Heather was now able to demonstrate how an analysis of drawings, paintings, or pictures produced by a client can be used as an assessment tool to guide a “transitive diagnosis”. Heather continued her research further refining her diagnostic indicators, and had her later manuscript titled “Using Contrasting Drawings or Pictures as an Assessment Tool within a Personal Construct Framework” also published in 2012. In this manuscript Heather explored the medium of visual meaning-making by focusing on the role of the creator of the visual image as the sole elaborator of the content, arguing the creator holds the personal meanings of the image.

Heather struggled bravely and with great courage with an incurable illness for many years. As the illness further defined her life, Heather turned her attention to events closer to home. As a dedicated local historian, she wrote a book about Brogers Creek, Berry, NSW. Always at front of mind for Heather was the welfare of the environment, and the status of the flora and fauna. In response Heather wrote a children’s book

about wombats. Her love for Australian fauna was often captured by Heather through photography. Not surprisingly Heather was a dedicated gardener all her life. As a musician Heather continued to play her piano daily until it became too difficult to sit.

Her Personal Construct family remembers Heather for her courage when facing adversity and her willingness to take on challenges and to see them through. She was Every Woman, always trying to make sense credulously of the world around her, beginning the day with anticipation and following the evening with reconstruction.

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Heather Foster and Desley Hennessy participating in some “Creative Construing” at the International Congress on PCP in Venice, Italy, in 2009.

REFERENCE

Hennessy, D., & Truneckova, D. (2021). Heather Foster 1943-2020. *Personal Construct Theory and Practice* 18, 18-20.