

Honorary doctorate for Peter Lang

Sharn Tomlinson and Miriam Richardson

It was a glorious day on Friday 27 March 2015 when the University of Bedfordshire honoured Peter Lang with the award of honorary doctor of science, in recognition of his significant contribution to training and development in the fields of systemic therapy and organisational development. We felt privileged to be able to participate in celebrating Peter's influence on our work as systemic practitioners and on our lives. Susan Lang was also very much part of the occasion and, as always, brought warmth and grace to the day,

The honorary doctorate awarded to Peter came as the culmination of the graduation ceremony of the University's Faculty of Health and Social Sciences. Michael Preston-Shoot, professor and executive dean, paid tribute to his life and work, bringing messages from significant systemic thinkers who have experienced creative working-relationships with Peter. We were reminded of his humility, charm and humour, alongside an outstanding ability to connect theoretical ideas with their practical application, embodying the idea of theory as lived practice and practice as lived theory.

Peter played a major part in the development of the Kensington Consultation Centre, which later became the KCC Foundation, a leading-edge training centre in the fields of family therapy, individual therapy and organisational management and leadership. Intellectually brilliant himself, he invited pioneers from other theoretical approaches, such as Barnett Pearce, Vernon Cronen, Heinz von Foerster, Humberto Maturana, Ken Gergen and John Shotter, to collaborate with KCC in workshops, summer schools and the journal, *Human Systems*. The cross-fertilisation of their thinking with that of leading international family therapists made KCC an exciting and inspirational place to study.

As well as Peter's international contributions to training, Michael Preston-Shoot celebrated Peter's therapeutic work, particularly with young people, often in collaboration with his long-term colleague, Elspeth McAdam, and again in many different parts of the world.

In his speech, Michael Preston-Shoot included tributes from Peter Stratton, emeritus professor of family therapy at the University of Leeds: "...a remarkable capacity for rigorous thinking which is at the same time highly creative"; from Sheila McNamee, professor of communication theory at the University of New Hampshire, who celebrated the international impact of KCC's training; from Mary and Ken Gergen: "[We have] the highest regard for him – his intellectual brilliance, creative imagination, remarkable skills as a teacher and consultant, and his dedication to the wellbeing of humanity"; and Soren Hertz, a leading Danish psychiatrist: "Peter has the skills and abilities to move on and create movements inside the complexities of human interactions".

The university is proud to host, nurture and develop some of the legacy of Peter Lang through his inspired design of the professional doctorate in systemic practice, led by Gail Simon, and the MSc in systemic leadership and organisational development, under the leadership of Christine Oliver and Martin Miksits.

Included in the tribute was recognition of the significant part played by Peter's wife and intellectual companion, Susan Lang,



Sue and Peter Lang with Gail Simon

and her tremendous contribution to the training and development of systemic therapists and consultants. She has worked tirelessly for the systemic community, with good humour, wit and wisdom, and those of us who studied at KCC have warm appreciation of her support for our studies.

Peter was invited to respond with a short speech, which demonstrated the way he has managed his Parkinson's dis-ease, with great humour, grace and dignity. In thanking the university, he expressed his appreciation for its part in promoting systemic study.

It was a moving and impressive ceremony. As quickly as it began it was over and we all left the church – St Mary's in the centre of Luton – back out into the glorious sunshine and the celebrating graduates, and a glass of champagne in Peter and Susan's honour.

The following link will take you to some video of the occasion: <http://www.peterlangfoundation.com/index.php/peter-lang/aeresdoktor-2015/film-fra-graduation-ceremony>

The University of Bedfordshire and the Friends of KCC are organising a Festschrift for Peter Lang on Saturday 27th June 2015, 10.00am to 4.30pm, in the postgraduate centre at the University in Luton. For detailed information and to book a place, contact friendsofkcc@me.com

the magazine for family therapy and systemic practice in the UK

Context



Working with complexities, vol.2

Context 139, June 2015