

## Four new psychology National Teaching Fellows

Four psychology staff were among the 50 lecturers and learning support staff awarded National Teaching Fellowships in 2010. The winners were chosen from nearly 200 nominations submitted by higher education institutions across England and Northern Ireland. Each winner receives £10,000 to be used for their professional development in teaching and learning or aspects of pedagogy.



Annie Trapp



Alex Haslam



David McIlroy



Peter Reddy

Annie Trapp (University of York) received her fellowship in recognition of more than 15 years' work researching and enhancing psychology learning and teaching. Annie is currently director of the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network and project director for the European-funded psychology learning and teaching (EUROPLAT) academic network.

Alex Haslam (University of Exeter) has been a university teacher for over 20 years. He received his award primarily for work with Steve Reicher on the BBC Prison Study. This replication of the Stanford Prison Experiment produced an array of insights into social psychology and also developed many high-quality teaching resources.

David McIlroy (Liverpool John Moores University) has been involved in

collaborative research at national and international levels, leading to publications related to secondary and tertiary level psychology education. David has also worked regularly with the Psychology Network to assist postgraduates and young lecturers in pursuit of sound pedagogical practice.

Finally, Peter Reddy (Aston University) aims to prize and develop students from a humanistic value base. He is currently working on a new module on the psychology of undergraduate development, which aims to integrate personal growth, intellectual development, reflexivity and employability to help students to personalise their learning and make the shift from dualist to relativist reasoning.

Our congratulations to all the new fellows on their awards.

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# Practice sharing

## Teaching mental health using first-person accounts of madness

Gail Hornstein, Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, US

I take first-person accounts of madness\* as the core sources for a 14-week seminar in personality and abnormal psychology for advanced undergraduate psychology students. In so doing I am trying to alter radically students' assumptions about mental illness and about whose claims in a contested domain get to be taken seriously. I assign a different first-person narrative each week and, the day before each seminar session, students are required to turn in a two-page 'reflection' describing what they found most interesting, provocative, or confusing about that week's narrative. This ensures that students do the reading and are prepared to make an active contribution to discussion. It also means that I have less than 24 hours to read these 15-20 two-page papers before the seminar session. However, this assignment does enable me to go in to the discussion with a sense of what needs to be clarified, emphasised, or posed as questions for debate. This is especially useful when quiet students turn out to hold minority positions that might otherwise get short shrift.

I deliberately choose as required texts those that take opposing positions, or an unexpected stance on a controversial issue (for example, support for Electro-Convulsive Therapy). I emphasise at every possible opportunity that, when you start with first-person experience instead of diagnostic

categories, the main thing you see is diversity. I talk with my students about the difficulties inherent in their simultaneously studying with colleagues in my department who teach that, for example, schizophrenia is an incurable brain disease and that personal narratives have no relevance or authority in science. I use these contradictions and disputes as powerful illustrations of the contested nature of claims in psychology and psychiatry more generally.

Few people are in a position to teach a 14-week course using first-person madness narratives as the only required texts. But much of what I have learned from doing this applies equally to using a few such narratives within a module. What is essential is not to allow this material to be cast simply as a 'clinical illustration' or 'case history'. First-person narratives have to be presented to students as challenging fundamental assumptions about 'irrationality' and 'incurability' and not simply as exemplars of symptoms or diagnostic categories. We have to be willing to tolerate the uncomfortable feelings that first-hand accounts often provoke in us, modelling for students an undefensive response to having fundamental assumptions called into question. And even though we ourselves are 'experts by training' we have to be open to allowing 'experts by experience' to make claims that are authoritative.



As Harper *et al.*'s (2007) Psychology Network funded miniproject suggests, it is time for a serious reconsideration of how we teach about mental health within psychology programmes. Testimonies and first-person accounts of madness have a crucial role to play – exposing the limits of psychiatry's explanations, helping to reframe fundamental psychological issues, and offering up new theories and methods.

For more information, including free copies of the Bibliography of First-Person Narratives of Madness that I have compiled, visit:

<http://www.gailhornstein.com>

### References:

Harper, D., Cromby, J., Reavey, P., Cooke, A. & Anderson, J. (2007) Don't jump ship! New approaches in teaching mental health to undergraduates, *The Psychologist*, 20 (5), 302-304

\*I use the term 'madness' because this is how many of the people who experience extreme states of mind or severe emotional distress talk about their own experience.