

The Lebenswelt Experiential Exercise

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Purpose:

To counseling students, the Existential orientation and its concepts can often feel overwhelming and imprecise as much of the approach is rooted in philosophical ideas rather than structured clinical criteria. To help counseling students and new clinicians literally see the components of their lived world, the Lebenswelt Experiential Exercise was created. In order to help guide clients through the process of examining their way of being and create lasting positive change, a clinician must first help the client to understand the relevant components of their lived world or “Lebenswelt.” The activity is intended to both aid in the instruction of Existential theory as well as to explore one’s personal Lebenswelt or lived world. Total time for the exercise is approximately forty to sixty minutes. While created to aid counselor educators in the instruction of Existential theory specifically, the Lebenswelt Experiential Exercise addresses Humanism in several ways. The exercise emphasizes the value of human beings and honors both their individual and collective reality and value. The exercise takes a positive and reflective view of both the educational and counseling process while focusing on personal responsibility for the actualization of the self.

Materials Needed:

The exercise requires a stack of post-its per individual participant, a large blank wall or similar space, a pen or pencil for each participant, and a list of Lebenswelt prompts if needed (provided).

Procedures:

1. Distribute post-it notes and pens
2. Invite participants to free associate responses to verbal prompts from instructor
3. Invite participants to record each individual response on a single post-it note. Responses may be anything from a single word or phrase to a drawing or doodle.
4. Instructor begins slowly reading questions/prompts from verbal prompt sheet (see verbal prompts below for ideas)

Verbal Prompts for Exercise:

What are your favorite things?

What are things you dislike or can’t stand?

Who are your favorite people?

Romantic Relationships: Spouse, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, lover...

Family: mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, cousins...

Friends: best friend, co-workers, childhood friends...

Celebrities: actors/actress, reality star, model, comedian, musician...

Who are people that you don't like?

What do you value?

Family roles (parent, sibling, caretaker...)

Financial stability, work, determination, drive, achievement...

Personal Items: Family heirloom, photographs, nice shoes, jewelry, watch, house, car...

Religion/spirituality, freedom, equality...

Who are you? What do you believe about yourself?

- Character traits/personality traits

- Gender, ethnicity, age...

- Internal fears, hopes, dreams, goals...

- Positive/negative messages you tell yourself

- Who are you? What makes you unique?

What do you believe about people?

- Inherently good, bad, blank slate...

- What you do believe about humanity? Relationships?

- What would others say about you? How are you perceived?

- What makes someone "good" or "bad"?

What do you believe about the world?

- Dangerous place, safe place, a place of chaos, a place of peace, beauty...

- Politics, government, freedom, nationality, pride...

- What should the world be like?

- What do you believe others think about the world, humanity, etc...

- What makes the world "good" or "bad"?

5. Instructor invites each participant to place all of their post-its in one area on a wall in the classroom (placing post-its on an individual desk may be used if wall space is limited). This is the individual's lived world.

6. (Process Existential concepts of the personal lived world: *uberwelt*)

7. Instructor invites each participant to move to a different individual's area of post-its, preferably an individual they do not know well. The participant is now in the lived world of the "other."

8. (Process Existential concepts of the *mitwelt*)

9. Instructor invites participants to edit the statements in the lived world of the other that are not congruent with their own values, thoughts, ideals, likes, dislikes, etc...

10. Instructor invites participants to return to their original lived world.

11. (Process Existential concepts of *eigenwelt*)

12. Instructor invites students to record thoughts, feelings, emotional responses, etc... to edits on new post-its. New post-its are to be placed on the wall in blank areas to fill-in gaps between lived worlds and form an individual world within a larger shared world.

Process Questions and Follow-Up:

Process questions for the conclusion of the activity are as follows:

1. Discuss how the personal lived world is comfortable/familiar
2. Discuss how the Lived world of the other took effort to make fit, can be incongruent, etc... But we try to make it fit to ease tension/anxiety (to “fit-in”)
3. Discuss how the Post-its between worlds represent this surface response to the tension/anxiety that keeps individuals/families/humanity trapped in a binary world

Theoretical Rationale and/or Research Base:

The Lebenswelt Experiential Exercise is grounded in Kolb's experiential learning theory. According to Kolb (1974), students typically learn via a four stage learning cycle. This cycle begins with a concrete experience during which individuals encounter a new experience of a situation or a reinterpretation of an existing experience (Kolb, 1974). This is followed by reflective observation of the new experience marking the second phase of the cycle. Of particular importance during the reflective observation phase are any inconsistencies between the experience and understanding. The third phase of the cycle consists of abstract conceptualization during which individual's reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept (Kolb, 1974). Active experimentation completes the cycle whereby the learner applies knowledge gained during abstract conceptualization to the world around them to see what results. Kolb (1974) views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence. However, effective learning only occurs when a learner is able to execute all four stages of the model Kolb (1974). Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is as effective as a learning procedure on its own.

Limitations:

Due to the personal nature of this activity, its implementation must be carefully administered. Informed consent is recommended prior to participation. Persons implementing the activity must also be prepared to fully process emotional experiences of participants both during and after the activity as well as monitor and report any responses with regard to abuse, tarasoff, and or self harm. Additional imitations to implementing the activity include sufficient space inclusive of surfaces appropriate for adhesive materials and a minimum number of 4 participants with 12-15 participants being ideal.

Practice Settings:

- Counselor Education and Supervision
- Mental Health Agency/Private Practice Counseling