

A practical application of Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)

– a therapeutic conversation for finding oneself¹

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Abstract:

Existential Analysis, a psychotherapeutic approach derived from existential philosophy, intends a life with inner consent. This implies activating the authentic personal will (freedom) and responsibility. The method used for that purpose is “Personal Existential Analysis”. It defines three steps which help to find the resources of the innermost (intimate) person (“Me”) and its individual way to expression in a defined situation (“Self”). – A practical application is shown in this verbal transcript of a therapeutic conversation supplemented by explanatory commentaries about the therapeutic process itself.

Keywords: Psychotherapeutic practice, psychotherapeutic process, Personal Existential Analysis, personhood

Existential Analysis

Existential Analysis (EA) is a specification of Existential Psychotherapy. It has been founded by the Viennese psychiatrist and famous holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) (Frankl 1938, 1946, 1959, 1982a, b, 1983, 1984, 1985; Wicki 1991). He laid the layers of the theory between 1926 and 1933 and developed at the same time a specification within EA, which he called *Logotherapy* (Frankl 1967, 1985). Frankl has found the search for *meaning* as the deepest motivation in human existence. For that reason he coined the term „Logo“-therapy – therapy and healing through finding meaning (Frankl 1967). Frankl has concentrated his endeavor on the development of Logotherapy and the prevention of loss of meaning (Yalom 1980).

Whereas Logotherapy is centered on the treatment of meaning-disorders, *Existential Analysis* as psychotherapeutic method is apt to treat all different kinds of psychic diseases. The core assumption of EA holds that the human being is primarily using his *decisive power* to reach the level of a full and fulfilled existence. To do so the individual activates his/her innate openness to the (outer and inner) world by entering a dialogue. EA therefor holds two elements as generally pathogenic:

- acting (living) with inner *disagreement*
- lack of *dialogue* – inner dialogue and/or dialogue with the “world”.

On the layers of this existential weakness the specific etiological factors of different disorders can spread and develop their pathogenic power. Trauma is doing harm only when it leads to blockades in the coping with the life-situations. The psychodynamics then turn around four existential themes:

¹ **Engl. translation of:** LÄNGLE A. (1993) Ein Gespräch zur Selbstfindung anhand der Personalen Existenzanalyse. In: Bulletin der GLE 10, 2, 3-11

- 1) Anxiety disorders turn around the *holding* structures of existence based on the experience with the world. Regularities, pertaining laws and life conditions, experiences of trust etc. allow the subject a firm being in the world.
- 2) Depressive disorders are centered around the *relation* to one's own life which is experienced by emotions, affects and moods. It opens the world of values and relation.
- 3) Histrionic disturbances deal with the loss of the inner *self* and sense for the own (identity). Esteem, appreciation, encounter with others and moral conscience open the world of self-esteem and authenticity.
- 4) Some forms of dependencies, fanaticism and existential vacuum are *meaning*-related problems. People suffer from a loss of coherence to a greater value (system) which gives an understanding for one's own acting and being in the world.

EA can be *defined* as a phenomenological psychotherapy aiming to help patients to gain a free emotionality, to find authentic inner positions and to come to a responsible way of expression and action with oneself as well as with others and things. The central method for that purpose is called "Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)". The result of a successful existential-analytical psychotherapy can be indicated in living with inner consent to one's own acting and being in a dialogical exchange with one's world.

EA aims to install the free and responsible *person* as the acting (and not merely re-acting) centre in its own life. It therefore tries to mobilise the person's decisive potentials (Jaspers) based on an activated emotionality (Scheler) and a dialogical exchange (Buber) with the situational (inner/outer) givings (Frankl).

Its approach is phenomenological, which means fundamentally open to whatever the patient is actually moved by and dealing with. EA works with the subjectivity of both, the patient's and the therapist's. In focussing the patient's (often unconscious) decisive potentials, it confronts them with his/her personal responsibility. This process goes mainly along with finding and clarifying emotions which accompany the experiences, for they are the basis for any realization of freedom by making decisions. Having freed the emotional experience, the person can find his authentic positioning and his attitudes towards the world and towards himself/herself. Thus regaining his/her own essence he/she is enabled to answer the world in a selfaccepting manner. This, in short, is the purpose of PEA (Längle 1994). PEA works at the level of the subjective (i.e. personal) experience and activated emotions, which includes perceptions, evaluations, attitudes (decisions) and possible actions to the situation.

PEA is based on Frankl's theory, but goes methodologically far beyond Logotherapy. It implies a turn toward the patient's inner experience, which leads away from the logotherapeutic concentration on the outer world of duties and offerings of the situation.

In this paper is presented a particular part of a therapeutic conversation which has been chosen in order to show a typical procedure of PEA. In this section of the therapy, the main emphasis has been given to the practical handling of an overwhelming situation. As a consequence a great part of the treatment consisted of finding an adequate mode of behaviour. This special part of the treatment dealt therefore more with behaviour than with experience and motivation, which would be more typical for a psychodynamic application of the PEA. The activation of personal basic functions within the frame of an actual life situation has also therapeutic effects on the ability of coping with conflicts of the past, as will be shown. In the following case, the PEA aimed at finding and practising means and ways to a better realisation of the „personal potential“ in everyday life.

A brief description of PEA

As most readers may not be familiar with the PEA, a short summary of this method is given (for detailed information see Längle 1989, 1994). The PEA consists of three main steps, preceded by a descriptive phase:

PEA 0: **DESCRIPTIVE** phase

PEA 1: elaborating the subjective (“personal”) **IMPRESSION** by a phenomenological analysis

PEA 2: Finding one’s **STAND** towards the situation by evaluation and judgement

PEA 3: Finding one’s personal **EXPRESSION** according to one’s stand and the actual circumstances

The patient starts with a **DESCRIPTION** of the situation. This informs the therapist about the problem. He, on the other hand, makes sure that the report is clear, complete, realistic, and free of contradictions, interpretations or fantasies. While the patient is informing the therapist, he experiences a reactualisation of the situation.

His actual and/or former experience of the situation is then examined more closely. For that purpose it is important to elaborate on the **IMPRESSION** (PEA 1) received in or by the situation. This impression consists of spontaneous reactions on two levels: the primary emotion or sensation and the immediate impulse for action. This contains the objective facts as perceived by the individual.

In the next step, PEA 2, the patient first works on understanding his primary emotion, his impulse for action, but also the actual facts of the situation. He does this with a view to increasing the integration of his experiences into the biographical and the present context of his life. Understanding forms the basis for both, personal evaluation along the lines of his conscience and a judgement of what happened. This lays a solid ground for formulating of one’s personal *intention* on how to encounter the so far unmastered situation.

The personal process of dealing with the “*Lebenswelt*” (Husserl) concludes by finding one’s own **EXPRESSION** (PEA 3), i.e. *what* the person can and wants to do to in the respective situation and *how* and *when* and with *which means* he or she can do it. This is the basis for personal action in the given situation.

By following these steps, it is highly probable for a person to obtain a sense of fulfilment in his or her existence in general, as well as he or she can find clues for acting within the situation itself. The method can help to improve the potential for a dialogue and therefore the capability of true encounter which is fundamental for developing one’s own existence (Buber 1973; Plessner 1950; Scheler 1980, 1991; Strasser 1954).

The psychological background of the therapeutic conversation

Since it is not the aim to replicate the therapy in its full length, only the background relevant for the illustration of this method is shown.

Claudia, almost 30 years old, is very much afraid of closeness, so that getting in contact with her at all was only possible by maintaining a certain distance that was at the same time disturbing to both sides. At the time of the following therapeutic conversation this symptom

had almost vanished except for some fear of physical contact. Her fear of being left alone had also been strongly reduced. It had existed for years to such an extent that she would do anything in order not to run the risk of losing a relationship. About half a year before this therapeutic conversation, she was able to free herself from this relationship, which had lasted for several years. At the beginning it was hard for Claudia to cope with being alone. During this time she noticed how often she tried to be “a good girl” with the aim of making a favourable impression on other people and thereby escaping from her sense of loneliness. But finally she coped with living alone.

Her relationship with her father has also improved. But she has noticed that she has not yet been able to get into close contact with him. She could not show him openly her negative and aggressive feelings. She thinks that this is the reason why her relationship to her father is “somewhat superficial” at times.

The fact that Claudia cannot tell her father negative feelings is, in her own opinion, connected to her father’s personality. She said that he was a person who could not stand criticism, because it makes him feel helpless. But as she values her relationship to him, she prefers to go on as before, even though they meet less often now.

A similar inner distance is also felt by Claudia in other relationships, especially when “she lets other people expand”. When she is with some of her friends, she lets them tell her about themselves without interruption. At the same time she is self-effacing. This produces polarities on both sides: talking without end on the one hand as well as stepping back to a degree that makes her “as small as a mouse” on the other hand. Claudia has the feeling that other people have a right to say whatever they want to. “They do it in such a friendly way that I feel completely helpless”, she says. However, when someone approaches her in aggression, she is in fact able to put up opposition and to fight back. Her problem is not aggression, but “being raped through friendliness”, as she puts it.

So far the introduction into the present stage of Claudia’s therapy:

Putting the situation in concrete terms and leading towards the “impression” received.

After the description of the above-mentioned problem, Claudia is asked about a concrete situation, where she has experienced this “being raped through friendliness”. It was not hard for her to remember a concrete situation, which happened to her in the last few days, because it still preoccupied her.

C: I don’t know how many times I have heard her voice on the answering machine: “Elfi speaking. I just wanted to call.” Elfi is a friend of mine, to whom I talk almost every day by phone. When I call her back, she wants to tell me a thousand things and my work piles up more and more. That gets on my nerves, but I haven’t got the courage to tell her.

Th: What is it you would like to tell her? Can you say it spontaneously, without thinking it over too much?

C: “I understand you, but I haven’t got

Commentaries

For a better understanding of the situation and of what is going on in Claudia herself, she is asked for her spontaneous impulse (PEA 1), from which she shies away (“I haven’t got the courage”).

the time now.”

Th: What would happen if you told her that? Do you have any idea what she would feel like?

C: She would see it as a kind of rejection. (After a short reflection). Maybe I would have to say “I haven’t got any time now, couldn’t we talk at such and such a time later?”

Th: And how would that be for her?

C: Not very offending.

Th: What would you feel if you phoned somebody and that person told you “Couldn’t we talk it over rather in the evening than now?”

C: I would wait till the evening. – But if she told me the same thing every day for three weeks or so, I would be very hurt.

Th: Would you feel it to be a rejection if he told you “Let’s not talk it over now, but in the evening?”

C: A little bit, yes.

At this point we have to focus on her fear of being rejected, a fear that dominates her behaviour. In her life, the problem of “rejection” has always been, and still is, an important problem. However, in this part of the conversation, we are more interested in understanding her behaviour and in finding a way of how to cope with the present situation than in working through her biography. This may work, because the problem of “rejection” is also reflected in the present situation, where her own general fear of being rejected keeps her from showing a seemingly rejecting behaviour towards another person.

In order to show her what it is that makes her feels afraid and what it is that prevents her from saying this sentence, her individual understanding of the situation is asked for (PEA 2).

Proof of completed dialogue by a “self-transcendent mirroring”.

The therapist in this passage touches on biographical events only to the extent that makes it possible to understand her fear of spontaneously expressing what she has experienced in the larger context of her life. With this background the therapist now goes back to PEA 1 in order to grasp her primary impulse and her primary emotion in their total depth.

Th: As to the phone calls, there are still a few points that I do not quite understand. For instance, why do you call back at all when she phones, or why don't you tell her what you feel?

C: I don't quite understand that, either.

Th: Let's have a look at the situation again: You call Elfi back, you mark her number, hear her voice – what is it you would like to tell her in that moment?

C: Dear Elfi. I am sorry, but I haven't got the patience at all now to listen to what you want to tell me. Don't be angry, today I simply can't!

Th: If somebody told you “Dear Claudia, I am sorry, but I haven't got the patience at all now to listen to what you want to tell me. Don't be angry, today I simply can't!” – what effect would it have on you?

C: (laughing) “Dear Claudia – that's a crushing blow.” (short pause). I would have the impression that I am getting on her nerves, that she is not interested in me, that she doesn't like me.

Th: As far as I know you, I think you would react in a more dramatic way. Maybe you would wince, would be very hurt. We have seen that reaction in other conversations where we described that behaviour of yours as a defiant attitude, your way of thinking “All right. Have it your way. I will never again ask you a favour.”

C: Yes, right. I would start trembling.

Th: As far as you know Elfi, do you think she would react in the same way as you?

C: Yes, I am sure. Because she always tells me about her problems with being rejected ... (Short pause). With my father it would be different; he would start

This question brought the primary impulse and the primary emotional evaluation of the conversations to the surface. Claudia is fed up and doesn't want to listen to many of the things she is made to listen to it. She is impatient and feels impatient in the situation. But she doesn't want her friend to be angry with her either. In order to bring her hidden and unconscious emotions and attitudes towards her friend to the surface, she is asked for the impression she gets (PEA 1) when she is confronted with the sentence herself. In this way she can experience the situation herself.

The therapist draws upon in his own knowledge of Claudia to help her be true to herself, i.e. to find her own way of reacting and feeling.

In order to bring Claudia to a true dialog with Elfi the therapist draws her attention to the way her friend would behave.

crying, I know that.

Th: Do you understand that reaction of your father's? I mean, in the case of Elfi, you do understand her reaction, don't you?

C: He suffers from a terrible inferiority complex, without knowing it. If someone showed him how unimportant he was, this would hurt him a great deal. (Short pause). The most terrible thing of all is that I would imagine almost everyone to think in such a way ...

Th: If I tell you now "Dear Elfi, I am sorry, but I haven't got the patience at all now to listen to what you want to tell me. Don't be angry, today I simply can't", how does this sound to you?

C: Quite understandable. I understand that one cannot always have the patience to listen to whatever banalities and nonsense another person has experienced during the day. But the way you say it, it sounds quite friendly. The problem is that the way I said it, it sounded much more hurting.

Th: To me, this sentence does have something that hurts, even if I say it in the way I did. The words "not ... at all" somehow don't leave a chance, they are in a way extreme and impatient like: "Today we are closed. Come again tomorrow." (Short pause). And also the word "mir anhören" ("listen", but the German word has a negative nuance) seems as if you wanted to say, "to be forced to listen to the nonsense again". It somehow makes me believe that the only things you expect are banalities.

C: To me, these words mean, "having to do it again, like always."

Th: And could they mean anything like "This is not interesting to me"? It almost sounds like "I don't want to listen ..." as if someone complains about something,

The attention to others (Elfi) brings up a complex of vague projections: she assumes her friend to behave like herself and/or as her father at the same time ("I imagine almost everyone to think in such a way ..."). She now starts to differentiate.

The last part of the conversation already consists of the attempt to integrate into her life her primary emotion (feelings raised by the situation) and her primary impulse. By putting herself in the position of both herself and another person she comes to an understanding because the contents are seen integrated in their respective contexts. At the same time it also becomes clear why Claudia has difficulties showing her feelings: this might harm the relationship (what she does not want to happen).

Up to this point an important information contained and expressed in the sentence has not yet been mentioned. Therefore, the therapist repeats the sentence and lets Claudia have a closer look at it again.

The therapist notices that Claudia cannot feel everything she has already expressed spontaneously. In order to lead her towards experiencing the situation herself, he substitutes the missing link in her impression of the sentence (working on the "difference of the impressions"). He feels that she might follow too readily the model given by the therapist ("it sounds quite nice"), thereby trying to justify her own behaviour (one cannot be "patient all the time"). However, by doing so, she would block the way towards her own, proper impression. She would be contented too easily.

The therapist keeps interpreting the sentence by explaining in detail both his

overwhelms me with his problem, even though I have not got anything to do with the whole matter. I think that this “not having anything to do with the whole matter” is also contained in these words.

own impression and further aspects of possible effects on other people.

C: It is terrible, but this is exactly how I feel. Because I can't cope any more. Because I always wait too long to tell her such things. And then I listen to the stuff again the next day and the day after that ...

Th: That is exactly what we are talking about: Why is it that I act in the way I do? – Do you know it by now? Or can you feel why you act in such a way? (Pause). I wouldn't know yet, actually.

The completion of Claudia's primary emotion leads her to the “inside of her inhibitions”.

C: Well, I don't, either, I think. I mean, except for what I have already told you, that I don't want to make her feel rejected.

The therapist, by taking a personal stand, reveals exactly the way Claudia feels and fears.

Th: I think that what you actually want to tell her most would make me feel rejected.

C: Of course. And in the end I tell her “Leave me alone!”

Th: Is that really what you want? That she leaves you alone?

C: At that moment, yes.

Now Claudia is asked for her own, innermost position (PEA 2).

Th: Only at that moment?

C: (nodding) Yes. I wouldn't forever like her to leave me alone.

Th: Apparently, you don't want to put an end to this relationship ...

C: That's right.

Th: In the situation mentioned, do you feel that what you would like to say to Elfi would hurt her? (...) In the situation mentioned, do you feel that you are yourself, being terrible ...?

C: Yes, I am in a terrible rage. I would try to tell her in a soft way and formulate it nicely, but clearly enough that she can feel my rage.

Th: What are the consequences if you tell someone off in a nice and friendly way?

C: The people don't take notice. They phone again. Not even my mother, who in fact, knows me very well, notices, even when I am already in a terrible rage.

Th: So due to the fact that you act in such a nice and friendly way, nobody notices how you feel in reality?

C: That's right. And afterwards I feel quite down.

Th: It seems to me that the description you gave at the beginning can also be applied to yourself: "Being raped through friendliness". Apparently, you are raping yourself, too, by being so friendly to the others.

C: That's a good statement, you are right.

Th: I can still see something else. Apparently it is hard for you to express what you want to say without hurting the others and without risking the end of the relationship (for that is what you absolutely don't want to). That would explain why you behave in such a nice and friendly way, simply because you don't want the relationship to end.

In order to find a form of expression:
more evaluation and judgement

The last step in PEA was introduced with the following question:

Th: What would you have to tell Elfi so that everyone could understand your truth? So that your wish to keep up the

Making conscious the consequences of this behaviour.

Intrinsic evaluation: The therapist confronts Claudia with her own evaluation of the situation. By doing so, he also interprets her behaviour towards herself.

In Claudia's behaviour, an unreflected response to her spontaneous impulses became clear. Due to her experiences she has become more reserved in order not to put her relationships involuntarily at risk. Her problem was that of finding an adequate form of expression, which allows her to live her own emotions without having to efface herself.

relationship is also expressed? How would you formulate it in an acceptable way avoiding hurting phrases like “not at all” and “mir anhören” (= listen; neg. nuance)? For, at the same time, you are explaining to me that, in fact, it is nothing more to you than a kind of “anhören”, a kind of being forced to do it again.

C: I would like to see her only once in six months, that would be enough. (...)

Th: Why is it just an “anhören” to you? Why is it just an empty, uninteresting obligation?

C: That’s also a problem.

Th: (going back to PEA 2) Is it really uninteresting?

C: Originally, I think it was not. But now, I am not quite sure any more. (Long pause, then, a bit upset) I am not sure any longer. (...). Maybe it is too one-sided, ... actually; I am not sure whether I really believe what she tells me or whether I just want to be nice to her. (Pause). That’s a real problem. Actually, I would quite like to know it myself.

Th: (searching for a deeper understanding) How would you like the conversation with Elfi to be? Would it be better if she stopped talking about her personal problems?

C: Non, no. We have had afternoons with quite profound talks.

Th: Are the talks now still as profound as they used to be?

C: No. Because nothing important happens. She just talks. Sometimes it is interesting to see what a person like Elfi can be upset about and what she find impressive. Because the things she finds impressive I would not even notice.

Th: (taking position) I have got the

In her answer Claudia does not exactly answer the therapist’s question. It seems that she is not yet ready for the behaviour, the expression (PEA 3) mentioned. Claudia shows that she can’t think of any reason for meeting her friend more often. The therapist understands that the process of finding her position towards Elfi and the situation (PEA 2) has not yet been concluded, as it has only taken place on the level of the relationship, but not yet on the level of the contents of the situation (i.e. the common or “joint logos” as the joining element of an encounter, see Längle 1986). Thus the therapist is questioning Claudia’s former inner position towards the situation (it is an “anhören”, a “having to listen” to it) as far as the contents of the conversations and the reason for keeping up the relation are concerned, which means going back to PEA 2.

impression that there is something missing in your relation. What do you think?

C: Yeah. That I should take her seriously.

Th: What would that take? Do you think it would be easy?

C: That's the question. Probably I should not always be friendly and nice and listen to what she tells me, but – (laughing) – simply tell her when I think she is telling me nonsense, when I am bored with what she is saying. I should also tell her things about myself, even if she is thunderstruck. I should believe her capable of coping. I am treating her like an idiot. (Pause). In fact, by being friendly, one lowers the other person to the level of an idiot.

Finding a form of expression (PEA 3)

Th: I think too, what is missing is a real confrontation of the problem. For instance, when she phones you and you phone back, do you have an idea of what position to adopt, of how to confront the problem? If not, we can try finding one together.

C: Well, I should tell her the truth. I should just tell her “Elfi ...” (laughing). That is not so easy. (Pause). I am just thinking of something not too coarse, something moderate, something that gives her a chance, but that also gives me a chance. In order to learn what it is she wants. This is an important point, in fact: making clear what the problem is. And, on the other hand, also to say “I am sorry, but at the moment I have got so much work that I haven't got any time for you.” (Then, with clear voice, vividly). That's how I would like to hear it. If she told something important that happened to her, I would really love to hear it. But I don't want to hear that the butter melted after shopping.

The therapist expresses his own feelings concerning the relation and asks Claudia to define her own position towards her friend.

After having found her inner position towards both, the levels of the relationship and the particular situation, stage PEA 3 (formulating an expression) can be started. By going through the situation, the existential implications of her attitude can be felt and corrections of the interpretation are possible.

Th: (laughing) That's really not extremely interesting. But how do you feel about what you just told me, if you think about it? What effects would it have on you? I have just noticed that something is missing in what you wanted to tell Elfi – how do you address her? Do you want to try it once more?

C: It is more difficult if you have to say it in such a realistic way. But now I think I have got it. And within myself, I think, I feel already reconciled. Okay: "Hi, Elfi, it's nice hearing you again so soon after the weekend ... I just have to tell you that at the moment I have got heaps of work to do, so that I haven't got much time for you, but if you could quickly tell me what you are concerned about or whether anything has happened lately .."

Th: And how does that sound?

C: Nice:

Th: Does it hurt?

C: No. And it doesn't sound like a refusal either. I think it sounds good. I am trying to express that I am, in fact, interested in how she feels. And she would probably answer "That's okay. It's not so important what I was going to tell you."

Th: To me it sounds really nice, and at the same time it shows that you are setting limits. And then the conversation will not go on for hours on end.

C: Yeah, that's also what I feel.

Th: Well, that would be a model for many similar situations, wouldn't it.

Winding up the session

Th: What do you think of our conversation?

The therapist makes sure that Claudia does not evade, and makes her try the proper form of address towards Elfi. Claudia should experience the situation as if it were real and should not get struck in vague formulations.

In this part of the conversation the necessity of finding a proper form of expression for one's own attitude and one's own feelings is made clear. If one cannot express oneself, the person, despite all inner clarity and judgement, remains enclosed within him- or herself and is not prepared for putting his or her intentions into reality.

When looking for an adequate form of expression, it sometimes becomes clear that not at all necessary inner positions have been taken yet; they can be taken at that stage, too, as seen in the example.

C: I think it was exciting. It has changed my way of feeling. At the beginning I was very nervous. "Not Elfi again!" But through our conversation I feel somehow reconciled with her. I noticed that if I define my limits, I can accept the other person as he or she is. Actually, I like Elfi. I don't have to defend myself, I don't have to become aggressive or frustrated. That's exactly the point: I can see the other person again as what he or she is without having to fight against something I don't like.

The finding of a form of expression, therefor, has an explaining-retrospective function and a motivating-prospective importance.

Th: And only by doing so, I somehow start taking the other person seriously. And taking myself seriously as well.

The therapist suggests a short reflection and a deepening of the understanding.

C: That is very important! As soon as I take the other person seriously, I take myself seriously.

Th: Now the only thing we have to wait for is how you feel in the real situation and what you are going to tell Elfi.

C: Actually, it now somehow seems quite easy to me. And I think, in this way I could handle the relation with my father as well.

Review

In this conversation Claudia was able to find and express her own, situational emotions and affects. She did not have to let off steam, she got to understand that they, too, were justified. So she no longer had to hide them (PEA 1). The defining of an inner position concerning the relation and the situation talked about enabled her to understand the situation fully. (Understanding as a result of PEA 2: emotionality integrated in relevant contexts.) And this made her capable of formulating a detailed explanation of Elfi's behaviour, which was not just an emotional outburst (PEA 2).

The acceptance of her own feelings (PEA 1) and its integration into the biographic context (PEA 2) reduced her inner distance to her friend, a distance that had almost lead to a break up of the relationship.

It was equally important to find a satisfactory mode of behaviour and to try that out (PEA 3). By doing so, Claudia noticed that she was prepared for the situation and that she could handle it. She experienced how her own increasingly incomprehensible pressure of having to defend herself against a friend, was reduced. Claudia has found a way of being herself and at the same time living in the reality that includes the two friends.

Discussion

This session was a milestone in that therapy. The patient got a repeatable access to her personal potentialities of perception, impression (access to spontaneous feelings), evaluation or taking a position (access to understanding and sensing, judgement) and adequate expression (active behaviour). A few sessions later, dispersed over several weeks, the therapy was completed.

What seems to be of special interest in the application of this method is that a procedure effectively applied in the actual (present) situation can be highly effective without working through the biographical past. Nevertheless this should not be considered as an exclusion of the biographical work, in the contrary, PEA may be applied in the same way for processing traumatic experiences of one's life history (Längle 1991). The effectiveness of the phenomenological approach, however, lies in the activation of the personal resources and their mental power.

This might be quite unusual for psychotherapists mainly working with a psychodynamic paradigm. Nevertheless there are some parallels especially in PEA 1 (affects and impulses) and partly in PEA 2 where there is a similarity to insights and interpretations.

The structure of dialogue is characteristic and basic for the PEA. Abstinance of the therapist's interventions (i.e. of his dialogical participation) is rare and strongly defined. It is, for example, required in abstaining from interpretations or advice for most of the time. The therapeutic relationship, however, is dialogic, the therapist is present and makes himself mostly transparent in his emotions and realisations in what he is experiencing with the patient. For untrained therapists this kind of strongly participating relationship can cause difficulties like improper alliance or nontherapeutic privacy, chatting or friendly advice which bring the therapeutic process to an end.

The demonstrated conversation in this paper has many similarities with behavioural cognitive psychotherapy. This need not always be the case. With Claudia it is a result of a learning default in the patient's social behaviour. However, it has to be remarked that the therapy could probably have proceeded more quickly if the therapist had remained a little longer at the level of PEA 1 and 2. He was apparently attracted by the deficit in the practical part (PEA 3). His guidance seems to be relatively strict. In this case it might have been helpful because of the histrionic type of the patient's personality.

Many or most psychotherapies would be able to treat this patient successfully. The question of choosing a method today is not based on efficiency, but on another level. All psychotherapeutic methods are more or less equally efficient and the choice depends more on personal preferences and how well one can manage with the method – and whether one would like to be treated oneself using such an approach. For psychotherapy has first to be beneficial and effective for the patient – but then it has also to be interesting and rewarding for the therapist himself or herself. If it is not – then our work is not worthy of the patient's human trust and personal suffering.

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