

Ein Integraler Gestalt-Ansatz für Therapie und Beratung

[An Integral Gestalt Approach for Psychotherapy and Counselling]

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Summary

In this text we present our concept of psychotherapy and counseling in the frame the integral paradigm as we understand it. We briefly explain four requirements for a professional concept of this kind: the elaboration of complexity and multi-perspectivity, intentional development within an holarchical spectrum, offering orientation and meaning making structures, and realizing the relational quality of life as well as enacting intentional dialogues. We then discuss the differences and commonalities of the terms “psychotherapy,” “counseling” and “education” or “continuous training,” and we argue that they form a continuum with a major common basis as well as specialized competencies and strategies required. Even “teaching” increasingly requires a great amount of counseling by teachers and trainers nowadays, if they want to take into account what recent research on learning processes has proved. Our practical concept for the Integral Gestalt Approach which we have developed and evaluated over many years in quite different professional fields, from university seminars to health institutions, is then explored under four sets of questions or categories:

1. *Intentions and tasks*: The main task of the approach is considered to be the handling of the polarity between accepting whatever is on one hand, and supporting development processes along the specter of development on another hand. A major challenge here is to discover an “inner witness” or a “third position” that is able to empathetically acknowledge whatever is, without being entangled. Utilizing a developmental model of a holarchy with five levels, or paradigms, from pre-personal to conventional to rational to relativistic to integral has been very helpful in accomplishing this. We distinguish between translative and transformative learning processes which may be initiated – translative meaning an increase in competencies, transformative meaning a change of paradigms in one or more dimensions of individual or social development. The main criteria for success of the praxis is considered to be whether rigidified patterns or frozen structures can be turned to become fluid again, thus enabling clients to be involved in new and sustainable processes of learning and self-organization.

2. *Communication and mentor-client relationship*: Great emphasis is given to the realization of “intentional dialogues” and the establishment of safe and reliable mentor-client relationships, as these are considered to be the most favorable conditions for challenging learning processes, especially as, according to new research findings, relational qualities are learned along with the contents of any learning process.

3. *Problem definition and diagnostics*: Problems can be defined on the basis of phenomenological exploration from many perspectives and at many levels of abstraction. Underneath these problems we may look for deep structures like repetitive dysfunctional patterns which then are investigated for their original meanings in wider contexts like personal history, social and organizational environment etc. Diagnostics are applied in the shape of recurrent mutual evaluation processes (in comparison to the staunch norm of “diagnosis before treatment”). Phenomena and deep structures are clearly differentiated from interpretations and explanations; traditional diagnostic models may be used by carefully adapting them to this integral approach.

4. *Strategies and methods*: Intensive contact processes guided by a four-phase model with a priority on exploration and self-reflection before the search for new perspectives and alternative solutions is considered to be the central method. Additional methods are designed in a way that they are close to normal live experiences in order to support the transfer of sustainable learning processes. Although trainings for this integral approach can build on a few established approaches to therapy and counseling, pioneering work is necessary as such an integral approach is still marginal. Therefore intensifying the networking of these pioneers is recommended.

Figures for the text

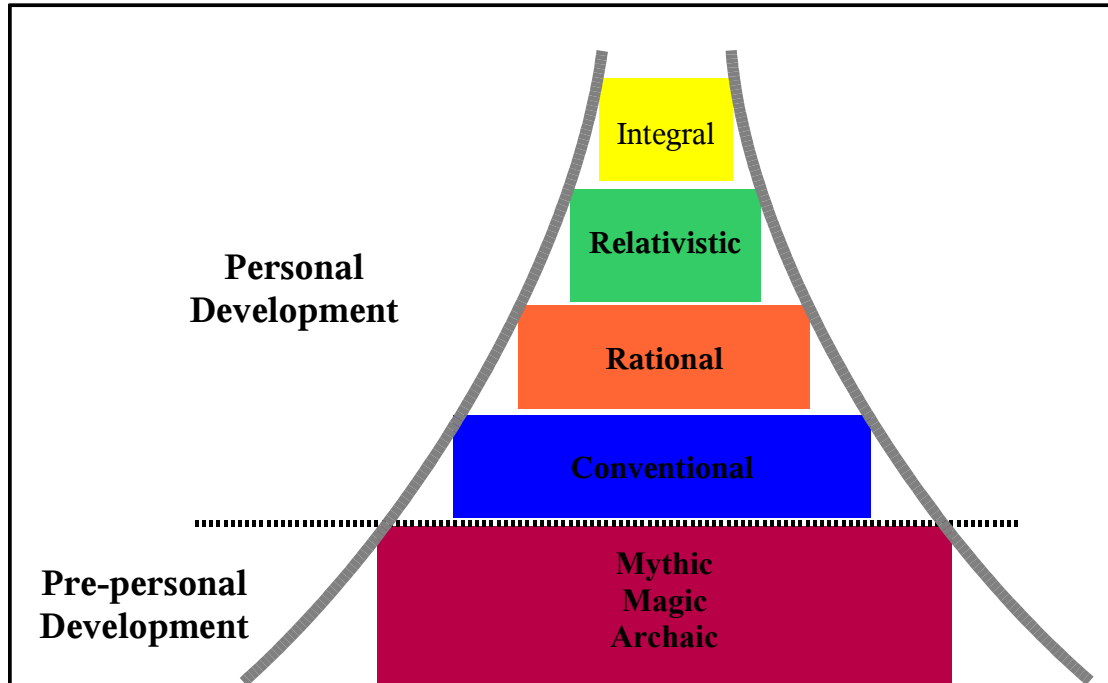


Fig. 1: Five stages or paradigms of development

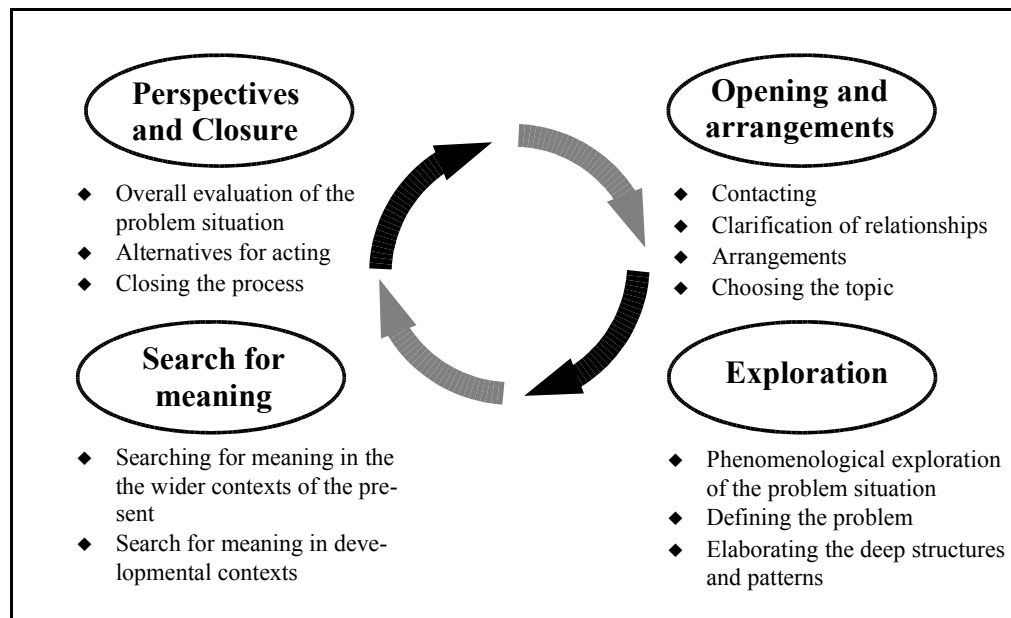


Figure 2: Cycle of contact in counseling and therapy

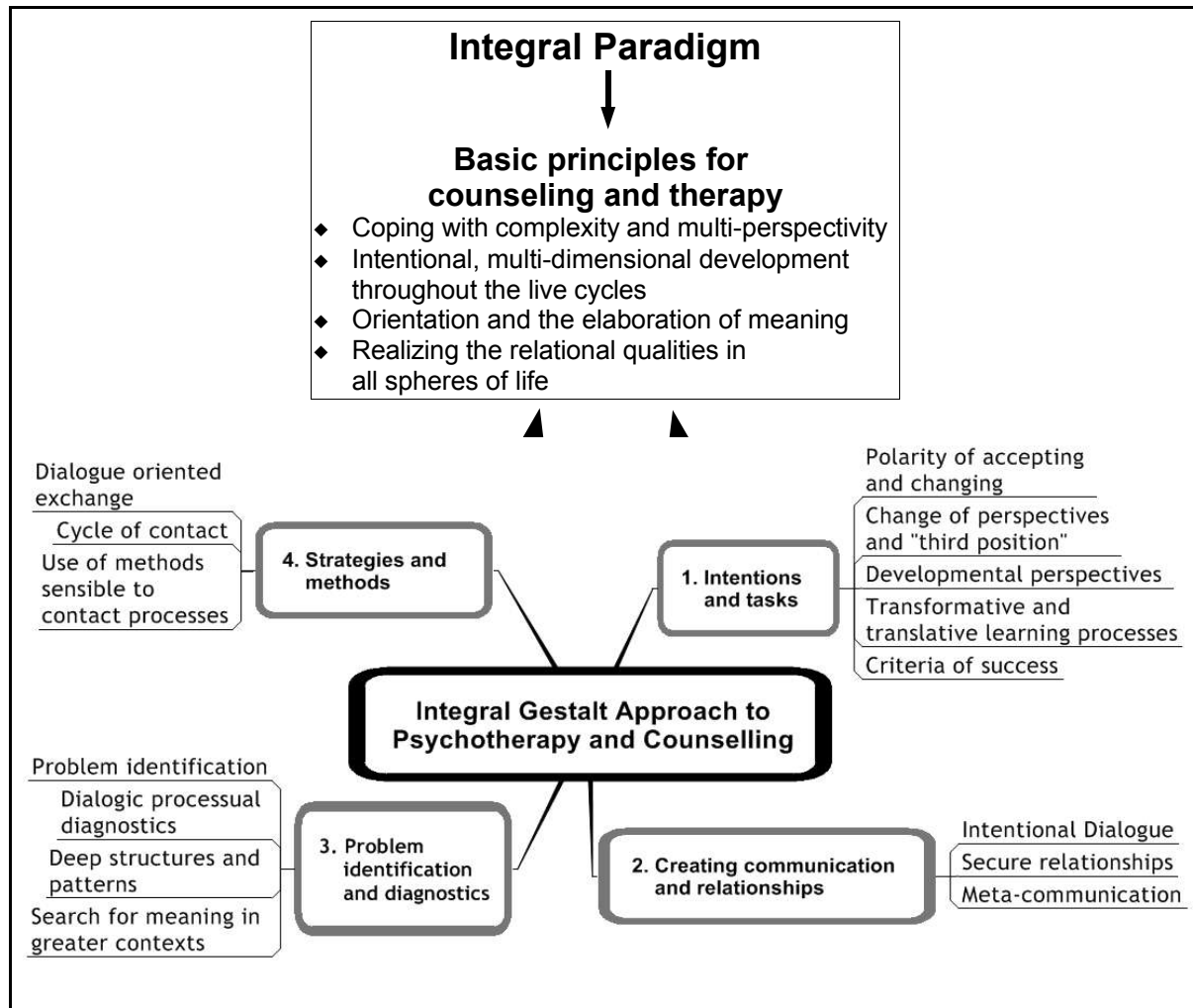


Figure 3: Survey on the Integral Gestalt approach to therapy and counseling