

Designing an Experiment

(A simplified version of Perls, Hefferline & Goodman's Model (1951/1973) by Clarkson & Mackewn (1993).

Precondition: A precondition for setting up any experiment is that the client is willing actively to attend to what she is feeling, thinking, doing, saying and to enhance her awareness through imagery, body sensation, non-verbal communication, description, possibly movement or enactment.

Stage 1: The theme of an experiment must be something of immediate interest to the client, so that she does not need to deliberately try to attend to it, but is naturally drawn to it. It must be something about which she is vaguely, but not fully aware.

Stage 2: The therapist suggests (or designs in cooperation with the client) an experiment, through the actual doing of which the client can explore the current field and increase her awareness, irrespective of the outcome.

Stage 3: The client is invited to either (a) exaggerate and amplify her present behaviour or attitude, or (b) inhibit her present behaviour or attitude.

Stage 4: As contact with the denied behaviour or feelings gets stronger, the client's excitement/anxiety will inevitably be aroused or mobilised. She will experience the experiment as some sort of 'emergency' or existential crisis and may therefore feel stuck between excitement and fear. This stuck point is also called the impasse. (Both client and therapist know that the felt emergency is in fact also safe.)

Stage 5: In the safe emergency, the repressed or unaware feeling, attitude, behaviour or memory can come fully into awareness and thus change the client's experience of her self or of her I-boundary.

Stage 6: The client accepts the repressed part of herself as her own, now feeling that 'it is I who am feeling, thinking, doing this.'