

INTEGRATION OF LOGOTHERAPY INTO A LIFESPAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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Human development is a course requirement for many disciplines, including education, counseling, and psychology. Often the course is taught as a lifespan course, offering a chronological look at the human being over the entire cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. Alternatively, personality theories are studied independently to understand human behavior and cognition.



The present paper examines seven comprehensive texts of lifespan human development for inclusion of material relevant to the noëtic dimension as elucidated by logotherapy. The paper then offers a logotherapy supplement to traditional approaches to teaching human development courses.

Lifespan Textbook Content

Human development/lifespan textbooks were selected for review based on the following criteria: each had to be relatively recent (1998 or later), comprehensive (not limited to one dimension, such as behavioral aspects of development), and lifespan in scope (chronologically covering birth through death). Textbooks that met these criteria included: Bee & Boyd,¹ Berger,² Berk,³ Craig & Baucum,⁴ Feldman,⁵ Kaplan,⁹ and Rice.¹²

The textbooks were evaluated for coverage of the noëtic dimension by examining the index of each book for topics such as "spirituality" and "religion." Out of the seven texts, both Craig & Baucum, and Feldman, had no references to "spirituality" or "religion." Kaplan had a single reference to religion in adolescence. Rice had two references to religion, mostly reporting on research regarding African-American religious involvement. The remaining three texts had multiple references, and more complete coverage, though usually related to religious faith or belief. Two of those remaining three texts referenced Fowler's stages of faith development:^{6,7} Berk had a table summarizing Fowler's *five* stages, while Berger had a two-page box covering Fowler's *six* stages in detail. Bee and Boyd presented several pages on religious beliefs and coping in late adulthood.

Overall, the total amount of text referenced in the indexes as “spiritual” and/or “religious” in these lifespan textbooks was minimal. In fact, it amounted to a fraction of one percent of the 4900 text pages.

Given that we live in three dimensions, as discussed by Frankl,⁸ then *soma* and *psyche* are receiving disproportionate coverage in human lifespan textbooks. What can educators do to better prepare our future educators, counselors, and psychologists to understand and deal with the human problems of existence?

Integrating Logotherapy and the Textbooks

One possible solution that will increase coverage of the spiritual dimension lies in the incorporation of an existentialist perspective of life as described by Elisabeth Lukas in a logotherapy training workshop on “Temporal Explication: The Nine Stages of Life.”¹¹ Unlike the portrayal of growth in developmental psychology textbooks, time in Lukas’ stages is dynamic and relative to the individual. However, it is still possible to use these nine stages in parallel to the basic developmental stages used in traditional lifespan presentations.

In all but one of the textbooks selected, it is possible to divide the course into 9 or 10 sections, consisting of: a) overview, theories and research; b) heredity, environment, conception through birth; c) infancy and toddlerhood; d) early childhood; e) middle childhood; f) adolescence; g) early adulthood; h) middle adulthood; i) late adulthood; j) death, dying and bereavement.

Lukas’ nine stages of life are: a) my parents; b) my early childhood; c) my school years; d) my early adulthood; e) my present; f) my near future; g) my distant future; h) my dying; and i) the traces I leave in this world.¹¹ Lukas points out that the first and the last stages encircle us, and have much to do with who we are, but are not, strictly speaking, parts of an individual’s life.

Although Lukas’ stages have a more dynamic, fluid nature, and do not map exactly onto the static stages listed above, they can be merged roughly with the textbooks’ sections for effective teaching purposes. Each of Lukas’ stages can be presented before the corresponding stage is reached in the textbook (see Figure) to allow the student to reflect on his or her own life events or potentials prior to reading the text.

Teaching the Integrated Materials

In applying logotherapy to the teaching of lifespan development, I have found it helpful to prepare the student in several ways for the paradigm shift required by existentialism. First, it is necessary to acquaint the student with: vocabulary such as “existentialism” and “logotherapy”; ideas such as the arena of free will, personal choice; and the logotherapeutic concept of time, which moves from the future to the past.

Stages of life as delineated in lifespan development textbooks, merged with Lukas' nine stages of life.

Nine stages of life	Bee & Boyd (2002)	Berger (2001)	Berk (2001)	Craig & Baucum (2002)	Feldman (2000)	Kaplan (1998)	Rice (2001)
My parents	Foundations Theories of development Prenatal development & birth	Beginnings Introduction Theories Heredity & environment Prenatal/ birth	Theory & research	Research & theory Heredity	Beginnings Intro Prenatal Birth & neonatal	Foundations Theories Genetics Prenatal Development & Birth	Study of developmental theory
			Foundations of development (conception through birth)	Beginnings (prenatal through birth)			Beginnings of human life
My early childhood	Infancy and early childhood	First two years: infants and toddlers	Infancy & toddlerhood (0-2)	Infancy & toddlerhood	Infancy	Infancy & toddlerhood	Child development
My school years		The play years	Early childhood (2-6)	Early childhood	Preschool years	Early childhood	
My adulthood (past)	Middle childhood & adolescence	The school years	Middle childhood (6-11)	Middle childhood	Middle childhood	Middle childhood	
My present		Adolescence	Adolescence	Adolescence	Adolescence	Adolescence	Adolescence
My near future	Early and middle adulthood	Early adulthood	Early adulthood	Young adulthood	Early adulthood	Early adulthood	Adult development
My distant future		Middle adulthood	Middle adulthood	Middle adulthood	Middle adulthood	Middle adulthood	
My dying	Late adulthood and the end of life	Late adulthood Death & dying	Late adulthood	Older adulthood (includes death and dying)	Late adulthood	Later adulthood Death, dying & coping with loss	
My traces in this world			End of life		Endings		

Additionally, my approach is experiential in nature; therefore, I use a modified version of Lukas' Temporal Explication Exercise. Because of its intensity, the exercise is optional, and alternatives are offered, such as a paper or project of the student's choosing. (Note: students who are actively undergoing therapy of any kind are asked to talk with their therapist/doctor and the instructor before beginning this process.)

Presentation of the Nine Stages to Students

In general, I present each existential stage the week before the corresponding lifespan stage is covered in class. This allows students to begin the process of reflection before they begin reading the text.

The first week of class, I provide an overview of the stages, and then cover the first stage completely, as well as describe a reflection paper the students are to write. The following is a synopsis of the introduction to the stages, which is presented on the first night of class.

Elizabeth Lukas shared the following exercise in a four-day workshop (July 30 through August 2, 1995). The exercise is not to be used without supervision, nor on clients in therapy. Lukas calls it a "temporal explication of the person." Though comparable to the structured preparation of an autobiography, it is specifically designed as a "confrontation" of one's "existence with the logos."¹¹

To look at these nine parts of life in confrontation with the logos, we must do it in an inner dialogue; we cannot do it as a group. In the inner dialogue, it is necessary to differentiate that which originates in the psychic dimension from that which originates in the spiritual dimension. To facilitate this, a single, blank sheet of paper is used, with a line drawn down the middle. The left side of the page is used by the participant to tell his or her story. The "telling" is about the facts or possibilities which exist. It is not possible for the writer to record everything, so there is always a choice that must be made as to what is most important.¹¹ I ask the students to limit their writing to one and a half typewritten pages, double spaced.

On the right side are three questions. The first addresses feelings. This is a response from the psychic dimension. The second denotes thoughts and associations the participant has regarding the story told initially. This also is a response from the psychic dimension, but one that aids in clarification. Note that the emotions and thoughts are separated in these two blocks.¹¹

Most important to the incorporation of the spiritual dimension is the stand the person takes toward the story. This third question is answered from a spiritual standpoint, and leads to a decision: "do I accept it, or do I have something yet to do?"¹¹ This leads to a confrontation with meaning:

Is it fulfilled? Can I integrate this meaning? Or is meaning still calling me, like a telephone still ringing? Is there something in my past [that] I still have to forgive, apologize for, become conscious of, go to a person and compel...?¹¹

The telling of the chronological story (Facts and possibilities)	Three Questions— 1. How do I feel about it?
	2. What do I think about it? –associate with it?
	(Answered as a spiritual person) 3. What stand do I take? How do I deal with it? Do I accept it? Or is there something yet to be done?

Lukas states that there are three axes, or polarities, with which we can examine our lives. These are negative/positive, received/given out, and past/future. Traditional psychoanalysis examines and works with primarily the left side of these polarities—the negative, what the person receives, and the past. But in this exercise a balance is sought between these polarities. Both negative and positive aspects of life are examined.¹¹ What is received and what is given out are both important to understanding the human being. The logotherapist does not dwell on the past, but focuses whenever possible on the present and future.¹⁰

In addition to the three questions on the paper, I require students to answer an additional question, telling me what it was like for them to complete this exercise. This is for the student's reflection, as well as a monitoring device. In particular, I watch for signs that the exercise is becoming too intense for individual students, especially in the first two weeks. On two occasions, this section has alerted me to students that have been either too self-absorbed to engage in a productive reflection of this intensity or too involved in crises to be able to reflect constructively at the time.

Throughout the course, each of the sections of textbook reading is preceded by a stage in the Temporal Explication Exercise. Each includes a brief introduction designed to bring a new perspective to the unfolding of life that ordinarily may be overlooked. From a theoretical viewpoint, these introductions constitute an existential developmental theory of human kind. As such, they help to balance out the traditional approach used by textbooks,

which limits the coverage to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of human development.

Student Reactions to the Exercise

In teaching lifespan development, I have encountered responses to this exercise that are wonderful and inspiring for their insight and evidence of healing-capability in the individual. Each response is unique to the person who has lived it.

Feedback on student reactions has been gathered and is presented below. This feedback was gathered from one section of a graduate course in Lifespan Human Development. All 13 students elected to participate in the exercise; one dropped the class during the term. Of the remaining 12 students, 9 chose to give written feedback. Because of the anonymity of the written feedback, demographic information is not available; however, the class was overwhelmingly female (11:1). Nine of the 12 students were Caucasian; 3 were African-American. The presentation of student feedback has received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Students were asked to respond in any manner they chose, with suggestions that they address: a) how beneficial the exercise was; b) how it could be improved; c) what they liked the best about it; d) why (or why not) they might recommend it to others; and e) any comments they might like to add.

A major category that emerged in the analysis was that this was an opportunity to reflect or meditate on their lives (addressed by 7 of the 9 participants). One student noted that “we are so busy with everyday life that we do not have time to stop and think.” Another added, “The best part was actually taking time to think about how wonderful my life has been.” Three students noted that the exercise gave them the chance to see the positive as well as the negative in their lives: “With the negative we have an opportunity to correct and make right that which bothers us.” Three students commented that they were now able to see their lives in a different way or “from a different perspective.”

In response to the presentation of the Temporal Explication Exercise itself, 2 students mentioned that there was “so much material” in the course textbook that the addition of the exercise was “too much.” Five students recommended further elaboration of the stages (i.e., “more examples”), though another student noted that specific examples might make it harder, presumably by providing a more limited framework for meaning-centered reflection.

Overall, 7 out of the 9 students offered unqualified positive comments about the exercise, such as “it was very beneficial” and “this activity gives personal meaning to human development.” A participant stated, “Logotherapy has helped me with my attitude toward things.... I have really

enjoyed this exercise and the class. The class has been a blessing....” One student summed it up: “Life feels lighter to bear.”

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