INTRODUCTION CREATIVITY AND GESTALT

have been qualitatively different from that of reading their words now, but each author/presenter approached the task of describing their workshops to you, the greater Gestalt community, in a spirit of sharing. As Zinker stated in 1977:

If Gestalt therapy is to survive, it must stand for this kind of integrative growth process and creative generosity; it must keep intertwining discoveries about our musculature, our archetypal origins, and our primal screams into novel conceptions. If we, the teachers of the craft, forget this basic principle of creative experimentation, of evolving novel concepts out of our own sense of daring, of being unabashedly bold, then Gestalt therapy will die with the rest of the contemporary therapeutic fads. (pp. 19-20)

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REFERENCES


Gestalt Pedagogy – Creativity in Teaching

ANSEL L. WOLDT, ED.D.

ABSTRACT

This article begins with a number of personal revelations about the author, heretofore unpublished, which set the stage for his approach to teaching and learning. Most notable among them is the severe closed-head injury he sustained as a child that left him with extensive brain damage and life-long difficulties with memory. In spelling out some of his learning experiences as a teacher, he lays the groundwork for the importance of creativity in the educational process, including ideas about creation and its relation to Gestalt therapy from his graduate students’ perspectives. The sections on Gestalt pedagogy elucidate many of the ways he has developed a Gestalt-based learning environment, the importance of experiential learning, and Gestalt’s holistic approach that enhances creativity in pedagogical pursuits. The article ends with some of the major pedagogical interventions he has used successfully over the past four decades, which facilitate learning to become a Gestalt therapist from a creative Gestalt therapy perspective.

Ansel Woldt, Ed.D., is an emeritus professor of counselor education at Kent State University, where he has taught and researched Gestalt therapy since 1968. He is co-editor, with Sarah Toman, of Gestalt Therapy: History, Theory and Practice (2005), and he maintains a private practice as a psychologist and clinical counselor in Kent, Ohio.
Background

The workshop on Gestalt pedagogy presented at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland (GIC) conference on “Creativity and Gestalt: An International Celebration” (August 2007), was based on my experiences as a learner since childhood, and as a teacher, counselor, and therapist from 1955 to the present. It is usual for me when I move into my instructional mode, whether teaching or writing, to feel grounded by bringing self-as-instrument and personal experience into the picture. Central to the pedagogical side of my life was the closed-head brain injury I sustained at age five in a freakish farm accident when I was kicked in the head by one of our draft-horses, smashing my head between her hoof and the stone wall behind the horse stalls in our barn. Having no memory for some time, followed by the loss of short-term memory for succeeding years until I was about eleven years old, necessitated the daily practice of organismic self-regulation and the art of creative life adjustment – processes I discovered a few decades later to be propitious principles of Gestalt therapy theory.

My experience of elementary school was essentially one of frustration, failure, and shame due to the fact that my teachers followed traditional rules and educational rituals where success and failure were determined predominantly by memorization and test scores, not about learning or life adjustments essential for the use of knowledge. As jokesters often say, “What I was good at in school was recess, lunch, and forgetting what it was the teacher said I should be doing.” Fortunately, my parents were respected and prominent members of our rural community, my mother having been a... elected to public office in Lake County, South Dakota the year I was born. With my 3 brothers and 2 sisters being the top students in their classes, my teachers and classmates marked me as the odd one – occasionally called “Woldt’s Brain Child” due to my brain damage. Quite naturally, I heard this as criticism and felt ashamed of my being.

Thus, it became my life-long task to learn predominantly by means of “right-hemispheric” experiences. How I was able to navigate in school I learned later was the polar opposite of brain-work required in traditional “rote education” that relies almost totally on left-hemispheric memory. Interestingly, of our six Woldt children, five of whom were academic successes with lives filled abundant in great accomplishments, I am the only one with a doctoral degree. Needless to say, these inimitable childhood experiences not only determined how I learned, but also vastly affected the way I go about teaching, or what I prefer to call facilitate learning. Shifting from my experience as a learner, I will next address some highlights of my experiences as a teacher and then as professor, or better, “pedagogue: a facilitator of learning.”

My first real pedagogical experience was as an officer in the U. S. Marine Corps following graduation from college. On my first active duty assignment, I was certified to teach military operations, tactics, history, and law. As I progressed from infantry platoon commander to company commander, I felt competent as a lecturer but preferred to teach by example and through in vivo experience. My time in the service of our country was followed by a stint in a department store where I thought I would become a personnel officer, only to find myself working in home furnishings and as an understudy of a famous interior decorator. This experience of working with the public, while learning about a fashion industry I had known nothing about previously, paid huge dividends when I decided to become a teacher, counselor, psychologist, psychotherapist, and professor.

To become a school counselor in those days required a minimum of 2 years of successful classroom teaching. Therefore, with a bachelor’s degree and majors in sociology and religion/philosophy, I first had to become certified as a teacher. This process necessitated another year of college in order to broaden my social studies background and complete education courses and student teaching. Student teaching provided me the opportunity to teach history, geography, sociology and psychology in a senior high school; it was paired with a semester-long experience as an understudy with an outstanding junior high school guidance counselor whom I assisted with individual and group counseling. That experience led to two years employment as a junior high school social studies and speech teacher. I soon realized as a teacher, and a basketball coach and referee (basketball official), that the real “subjects” I was teaching were students – that these young lives took precedence over the curriculum. It was with this educational mission that I received a full scholarship to a school counseling and guidance graduate program.

Surprisingly, upon completing my Master’s degree, I was encouraged by the faculty to go on for the doctoral program – an amazing scenario for The Brain Child who early in life wondered if he would be able to graduate from high school. Needless to say, my undergraduate education in a liberal arts college where much of the focus was on learning, knowing, doing, and not merely on memorization, had prepared me well for the unique graduate program in which I found myself. I have often commented about the student-centered and experience-centered orientation of that program, wherein we counseling students saw real child and adolescent clients in a supervised practicum almost from the beginning of our graduate work. There was an emphasis on developing one’s own unique style, based on the underlying belief that the “self of the counselor” is a necessary and important ingredient in developing a therapeutic relationship with clients of all ages. Dialogical relationships were cherished and rewarded. Little did these professors, three of whom were prodigies of Carl Rogers, know that they were laying the groundwork for my becoming a Gestalt therapist. During my time as the administrative assistant to the department chair, I helped with writing grant proposals for federally funded educational projects and research grants, which paid off later when I became a director of guidance and pupil personnel services in a Minnesota public school.
Upon completing my doctoral coursework and pre-doctoral internship in the university counseling center, I was recruited heavily for various high school counselor positions, and I took a job that not only provided support for completing my dissertation research but also allowed me to teach their senior psychology course. That class, meeting an hour per day Mondays through Fridays, provided me another opportunity to experiment with learner-centered classroom procedures and practices, small-group-based and cooperative learning experiences, paradoxical classroom interventions, and the art of facilitating learning. Students came to life with a desire to be present, make meaningful contact with both peers and instructor, not wanting to miss class because their curriculum was an experience that grew out of their field and involved their interests and needs. Instead of sitting as empty vessels or receptacles being “taught about” psychological principles, they were involved in the creation of our curriculum and classroom experiences.

As a school counselor, pseudo-administrator, and community activist, I found myself drawn to participate in a variety of community action programs that came on the scene at that time. Combining my grant-writing skills with my political leanings and commitment to serving youth, in the mid-60s I found myself being elected as the secretary of the regional community action program in northwestern Minnesota. With my contacts at the University of North Dakota, I was also involved with writing grants. This was in the early days of President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” and “War on Poverty.” Most noteworthy amongst the millions of dollars in funded educational and community grants, I authored was a massive multi-county “Neighborhood Youth Program” (NYP) for northwestern Minnesota and two “Upward Bound Programs” (UBP) for Native American and low-income North Dakota and northern Minnesota high school students. The NYP was designed to provide pay for nominal jobs for destitute high school students, many on the verge of dropping out of school, wherein they could experience learning as a valuable and satisfying activity. The Upward Bound experience brought some of these disadvantaged NYP students along with high school students from the Indian reservations and Native American boarding schools to university campuses in the summers to provide them with a taste of college life and positive learning experiences. It was amazing to see how these young people blossomed and came to love learning, considering that many of them were predicted to drop out of school before graduating. Much of the success of these programs was due to the philosophical and methodological underpinnings that promoted learning as a facilitative process, balanced between right and left hemispheric functioning, and non-traditional education where emotional intelligence was valued.

These federally funded programs had both an educational philosophy and a theoretical approach to change that integrated principles I had learned from four basic sources in my graduate program. First was A. S. Neill’s book, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (1960) – a story about a unique school in England for children who did not respond positively to traditional educational practices, where there were no laws of morality or religion, where the philosophy of love was lived, and where freedom without license was practiced successfully. Second were the principles of personal growth and therapeutic change from Carl Rogers, who had mentored both my doctoral advisor and internship supervisor. His books, *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951) and *Becoming A Person* (1961), were like bibles in our graduate program. The third, a rather modest influence, was Albert Ellis’ book, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (1962), not exactly a favorite amongst our Rogerian and psychodynamic professors. The fourth major influence was from a source barely known by our psychology faculty but filled with theoretical and therapeutic processes supportive of my own life philosophy, namely, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951).

My academic life since the mid-60s has been almost totally dedicated to graduate education of school and community counselors and doctoral-level psychologists and counselor education professors – initially at the University of North Dakota and for the past 40 years at Kent State University. While teaching practically every course in our comprehensive graduate programs, I had the good fortune to develop both curricular materials and instructional methodology based on experiential, learner-centered models and Gestalt therapy principles. Completing the 3-year post-doctoral training program at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland between 1970 and 1973 had a major impact on my pedagogical approach. Having taught at least one class per year (and sometimes 3 or 4) in Gestalt Therapy since 1970 has been pivotal in my feeling grounded in Gestalt therapy principles. Of course, having well over 100 people who were either students in or graduates from the GIC post-graduate programs amongst those many other graduate students augmented these pedagogical and learning experiences. Similarly, having directed 101 doctoral dissertations, over half of which were on some aspect of Gestalt therapy, also increased my being grounded in Gestalt therapy principles and practices.

**Gestalt pedagogy** is based on the belief that people are by nature health-seeking and capable of both self-direction and creatively adjusting to life’s challenges. Viewed from the perspective of Gestalt pedagogy, learning is an organismic, self-regulating process that involves the learners’ whole being with self-determined boundaries and contacting processes in response to the field conditions. Knowing that true learning entails more than what is demanded in traditional classrooms, teaching from a Gestalt therapy perspective regularly encompasses creativity, innovation, experience, and experimentation. A more thorough description of my approach can be found in the “Pre-Text” of *Gestalt Therapy: History, Theory and Practice* (Toman & Woldt, 2005), in which I elaborate on creating the field for teaching and learning. In addition to creativity, authenticity, and optimism, holism and trust are valued principles in...
the practice of Gestalt pedagogy. In discussing creativity with students in my Gestalt therapy class, we came up with a number of ideas and observations, all of which have ramifications for Gestalt experiments; they follow below.

**Creation and Creativity from the Perspective of Gestalt Therapy Graduate Students**

- To be creative one must be capable of inspiration, imagination, and transformation.
- The act of creating is giving birth to ideas, new life, hope, and endless possibilities.
- Creation is giving form to the formless, dreaming, and expressing the inexpressible.
- Creation is exciting, like walking down a new path not knowing what will appear next.
- Creation, as we know it, is the beginning of life on earth followed by rebirth and endings.
- Creation is the foundation of an idea and the action that effects some change.
- Creation is the wonderment of nature, at one with the universe in its vastness of life.
- Creating is making substantive contact in a new way – giving breath to life.
- Creating can be fun, artistic, playful, messy, exasperating, emotional, and satisfying.
- Creativity is constant, profound, liberating, powerful, freeing, ambiguous, transforming.
- Creativity is the ability to think freely to develop something new or unique.
- Creativity is making something new to understand our selves and the universe better.
- Creativity is the expression of what could be and can become – a precious gift!

The relationships between creativity and Gestalt therapy are often discussed in my classes, usually in conjunction with the role of experimental interventions and of experience in the learning process. The following diagram was created with a recent class as an experiment in discovering and describing some of these inner connections between creativity and Gestalt therapy:

- **Contact** is the essential ingredient of creation and of Gestalt therapy.
- **Relationality** involves mutuality and reciprocity, essential elements of dialogue.

**Pedagogical Gestalt: Creating a Gestalt-Based Learning Environment**

Through the practice of enhancing conditions for learning, it has been consistently revealed that students are more prone to respond positively to an invitation to learn than if they are ordered, coerced, or paid to learn. Learning from desire and from internal motivation is far superior to mandated and forced learning, and to studying that is based on fear. Gestalt pedagogy, ideally, involves a statement of trust in the inherent ability of the organism/student to know his or her own needs, the way to go about satisfying these needs, and the order in which they should be dealt with. Like dialogical contact and experimental engagement of Gestalt therapists with clients, authentic Gestalt pedagogy is a trust-based endeavor. It involves believing that the process will support the investigative procedure and that learning will occur. The following quotation from Laura Perls is an effort to help clarify what I mean by “authentic Gestalt pedagogy”:

- Experiment is bringing attention to the now, action to the content, theory to life.
- Awareness is the key process for attending to the obvious in the here and now.
- Trust is an initial objective in creating a cohesive learning environment.
- Inclusion is essential to develop a trusting and authentic classroom experience.
- Visualization is important because a picture is worth a thousand words.
- Individualize is necessary to meet every student where s/he is at to make contact.
- Taoism is the heart-beat of Gestalt therapy – living in the present moment.
- Yearning AND Gestalten is the way students respond to creative Gestalt pedagogy.
- Experiential is the formation and form of a complete unit, involving closure.
- Sensing is unique to Gestalt therapy – an experience is worth 1000 pictures.
- Touching is the “what and how” of initiating awareness and contact.
- Aha! is an expression often used by Gestalt students – they feel “touched.”
- Learning is accomplished when students are able to integrate their knowledge.
- Theory is the essential foundation for understanding Gestalt interventions.
The actual experience of any present situation does not need to be explained or interpreted; it can be directly contacted, felt and described, here and now. Gestalt therapy deals with the obvious, with what is immediately available to the awareness of client or therapist and can be shared and expanded in the actual ongoing communication. The aim of Gestalt therapy is the awareness continuum, the freely ongoing gestalt formation where what is of greatest concern and interest to the organism, the relationship, the group or society becomes Gestalt [sic], comes into the foreground where it can be fully experienced and coped with (acknowledged, worked through, sorted out, changed, disposed of, etc.) so that then it can melt into the background (be forgotten or assimilated and integrated) and leave the foreground free for the next relevant gestalt. (L. Perls, 1976, pp. 137–138, italics in original)

Gestalt pedagogy is much akin to Gestalt therapy, since it is both art and science. In working with students, it has always been important to let them know that my interest and intent is to offer them a learning experience which supports their developing a solid foundation in Gestalt therapy theory and clinical skills which are applicable to counseling and psychotherapy in general. Since most, if not all, graduate programs provide students with a variety of approaches to therapy, it is not my goal or intention to brainwash or convince them that the Gestalt approach is the only way to work therapeutically with clients (although I am sure I come across as believing that Gestalt therapy is the most effective approach for most clients). Thus, when they raise questions about how Gestalt differs from other approaches, or how best to integrate it with an approach with which they are more familiar, I welcome their questions and desire to integrate their new-found knowledge and experience. In fact, my usual pedagogical intervention is to respond to them by asking a couple of students familiar with the non-gestalt approach (in question) to role play or demonstrate a brief therapeutic interaction, which I will then process with comments about similarities and differences. On occasion, I volunteer to role-play a client by presenting the kind of issue or problem they are likely to face in their practicum or internship and have them use the “other” theoretical model with me; following that I process the scenario from a Gestalt perspective. Typically, I will then demonstrate the Gestalt approach to the same situation to engage them directly in a therapeutic experience. One of the things students often comment about is the word experience, because the other approaches they are exposed to rarely rely on that notion in their teaching, learning, or therapy processes. A discussion of experience leads to the next section on experiential pedagogy.

Experiential Teaching/Learning: Creative Pedagogy

If a picture is worth a thousand words, an experience must be worth a thousand pictures. On the surface, experience, experimental, and experiment are just words; in Gestalt therapy, however, they are cherished concepts, even more so, cherished possibilities for learning and change. To facilitate optimal learning, it is wise pedagogy to create an experiential activity for every concept and application in Gestalt therapy. For example, I bring experiential learning into our Gestalt classes, regularly employing paradox as a way to motivate students to read by giving them anti-assignments. Using paradoxical principles and interventions facilitates students’ taking more responsibility for their learning. Following is an excerpt from my Gestalt Therapy Syllabus that provides a paradoxical orientation to reading for the graduate course I have taught since 1970:

I would like to facilitate your introduction to the Gestalt therapy literature, philosophy, history, principles, methods, and intervention techniques by encouraging you to read a lot and engage actively in class activities, therapy demonstrations, and a variety of Gestalt-based learning experiences. To do this, I address your inner-self with an anti-assignment. From my years of teaching and mentoring graduate students, I know that reading assignments often engage you in a “top-dog versus bottom-dog” dialogue (Gestalt terminology à la Fritz Perls), internal argumentation, and even conflict as you go about addressing suggested readings. Much, if not most, of our class activity will be approached without exact reading assignments; however, you obviously will need to read in order to understand and participate in this class in a meaningful way. Therefore, I want you to begin by reading what catches your eye, what you are curious about, what piques your interest, what seems to stand out from the background, what you are motivated to look at, what you feel like exploring, what your heart desires, and what you intuitively are drawn to, with the possibility that it may address or touch upon some unfinished business in your life. If you find yourself not wanting to read, I suggest you experiment with delving into your resistance at the moment of awareness. In fact, you might consciously work at avoiding the book. If you engage in this experiment, pay attention to your inner processes and be willing to share your experiences with the class. In case you do not recognize it, this is a paradoxical approach to reading and learning – the principal approach to change in Gestalt therapy. Therefore, my real assignment for you, in this anti-assignment, is to explore what it is like to not read assignments or things you are told you “should read.” Then bring your reactions to this
anti-assignment to class for discussion. (Woldt, 2008, p. 2, italics in original)

The invitation to experiment with Gestalt ways of learning helps students attune themselves to experiential processes while simultaneously learning Gestalt methods and knowledge of theory, practice, and ethics of therapeutic relationships. Any noticeable resistance from a student to engage in the cooperative experiential approach provides an opportunity to describe and demonstrate how Gestalt therapists honor resistance as the energy, not the enemy. Approaching students in this positive manner – with an invitation to learn and honoring their natural presence – has typically yielded greater awareness, lively interest, enhanced motivation, authentic involvement, energized action, and significantly increased reading and engagement in outside learning activities. I continue to be amazed that most students report that they read more for my class than any others, digesting the three textbooks and several suggested Gestalt therapy books. Without the traditional academic competitiveness, this authentic Gestalt approach creates a cooperative atmosphere in the class, fostering a sense of belonging and community, and provides the foundation for integration of Gestalt principles with other therapeutic models and modalities.

Gestalt's Holistic Pedagogical Perspective

From Gestalt’s holistic perspective the therapist’s personal and professional development are inseparable. A general goal of Gestalt therapy education is to facilitate and support students to experience integrity in their personal and professional development. To best understand and integrate the Gestalt approach, it is important for students to experience in vivo both the Gestalt therapy process and Gestalt methods of processing. To accomplish this goal, I “invite” students to learn — which necessitates making contact with them and engaging them at our contact boundary. I attempt to “meet them where they are,” not where I may want them to be, think they should be in their preparation, or wish they could be. It has been my experience that treating students with the same kind of respect that Gestalt therapists show their clients effectively engages them in a desire to learn. I invite students to approach the Gestalt learning process with a fresh attitude about themselves as learners, asking that they, not I as professor, be responsible for their learning. I am making this educational experience a shared venture — it becomes “our” class, not “my” class.

In my first class meeting, I often use the metaphor of my classes being like having guests for dinner; my invitation is for them to come to the table to dine. While I believe I have some tasty morsels and food that will please their pallets and appetites, I do not yet know their tastes and preferences, their likes and dislikes, whether what I have prepared might satisfy their appetite. As we sit together at the dinner table we are for the most part strangers. I tell them I hope they have good appetites, that there is enough food available that “seconds,” “thirds,” even “fourths” are welcome. I want them to feel free to eat as much as they would like, while realizing of course that I cannot make them eat. Some will dive in, gobble up everything on the table and go to the cupboard for more, never seeming to have their appetites fully satisfied; they are starved for Gestalt dining. Many will want the recipes to take home with them. Others will nibble a bit here and there, leave some on their plate, chew over and swallow what tastes good, and spit out what is not appetizing, what feels indigestible, or tastes toxic. It is rare that we have people at the table who reject all the food, likely because they did not even consider accepting the invitation in the first place.

Using this metaphor in class, I introduce students to the Gestalt lexicon called introjective processes — swallowing whole without chewing, often creating indigestion — and its counter-processes, chewing and reconstructing. They have had plenty of experience with the introjective model because that is the traditional approach to graduate education: professors expecting students to swallow whatever the teacher thinks is important for them to learn and be prepared to regurgitate on their exams. Academic introjection is a process by which ideas, like under-chewed or un-chewed food, are swallowed whole. Contrarily, the Gestalt method discourages introjection, preferring to encourage, stimulate, and facilitate “chewing” on new ideas and methods so as to make them palatable and digestible. Using metaphors facilitates creative learning process and develops interest, curiosity, and motivation to learn more.

Not unlike Fritz Perls, at times I intentionally create ambiguity and frustration as growth-producing challenges in the learning process. This is particularly useful with students who are used to being “spoon fed” and expect faculty to take responsibility for their learning. Gestalt therapy’s basic principle of change is based on paradoxical theory.

Specific Gestalt Pedagogical Interventions

In closing, I offer the following list of specific pedagogical interventions consistent with Gestalt therapy theory and practice as a way of facilitating students’ learning to be better counselors and psychotherapists.

• Emphasize that our Gestalt class is just that – OUR CLASS! As the professor or instructor, it is not MY class. As students, it is not THEIR class, although they are paying for it. I reiterate throughout the semester that we are in this learning experience together. We are all a part of the field. Doing so also fosters a cooperative learning environment that is reinforced by including both in-class and out-of-class activities that require cooperation. My prime example of this learning approach is to have them meet weekly in a therapeutic dyad where they practice Gestalt interventions with a part-
ner from class. Sometimes I have a second dyad observe and give feedback on their observations. They then reverse the process.

- I take a photograph of my students in their first class session and have them complete a personal data sheet (see *Addendum*) that provides information for me and for their classmates, so that they are known by more than their name. I make a copy of everyone’s photo and data sheet for distribution to the class. This exercise facilitates interpersonal contact and the development of mutual support throughout the semester. They are advised that, since rather personal information is being requested for sharing with their class colleagues, it is only proper for them to not share the class roster with anyone outside of our class. This also provides an early lesson in the importance of ethical considerations in becoming a counselor or psychotherapist.

- I tell them early on that our class is like most of life – it is a process to be lived, not a problem to be solved; it is a journey to be experienced, not a task to be achieved. I remind them that truly learning something is more about process than outcome. I want our class to be a place where the focus is on learning, not memorizing; on practicing, not perfecting; on optimism, not pessimism. That I will attempt to develop experiences necessitating risk-taking, where a momentary sense of failure may produce more learning than always looking good, playing it safe, or being perfect. All of this is approached with the confidence that something positive can come from participation in classroom experiments where the results are never guaranteed – a primary principle in Gestalt’s valuing of the use of experiment. Experiential activities bring theory to life. Helping students “chew” over ideas before swallowing them facilitates digestion and integration.

- I have students create their own learning goals in writing, including how they think they might best attain them; I ask that they be turned in within the first couple weeks of the semester. While the former provides some guidance for me regarding expectations, more crucial is its importance to their experiencing personal responsibility for their learning. Speaking of expectations, I tell them my hope is that they will learn the difference between expectations and expectancy, saying, “I’d like for you to have no expectations, but great expectancy.”

- Focusing on and practicing how to stay with the here and now, with what and how, and with I – Thou, in every class session reinforces learning the most basic Gestalt elements. The step that follows “focusing on” and “staying with” is practicing and learning how to move these interactive processes along creatively into therapeutic dialogue.

- I invite students to take part in creative learning experiences that they rarely, if ever, experience in traditional educational programs. From the very beginning, they are invited to participate in therapeutic dialogue with me as we go around the class circle, sharing our present, here and now aware-

nesses in response to my asking them to complete the sentence, “Right now I am aware of . . . .” Doing live demonstration work with agreeable students is experienced as a treat that they do not receive in typical graduate work. Authentic presentation of me (the teacher, facilitator, therapist, consultant, trainer) provides a model for students to be real, realistic, and relational. Modeling appropriate self-disclosure supports the students’ openness and desire to make class a more authentic personal and professional growth experience.

- Believing that students will creatively adjust and self-regulate places these basic Gestalt therapy principles of living directly in their lap. A valuable aspect of creative adjusting as a therapist is learning how to work effectively with resistance – the key to which is helping them value resistance as “the energy” of awareness and change instead of “the enemy.” Finally, relating to students by modeling Gestalt-dialogical processes enables them to experience presence, dialogical attitude, genuine and unreserved communication, and thereby support for dialogical relationships – an ultimate Gestalt creation.

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ADDENDUM

PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION FOR CLASS ROSTER

Please complete the following information for use in developing our class roster. This will be distributed to the other class members to assist in knowing and contacting one another.

Your Name ____________________________
Name you’d like to be called in class) ________________________________
Email Address(es) ________________________
Phone No(s). ________________________________
Complete Home Address ________________________________

If you work in addition to being a student, Where? What do you do?, How do you like it? Etc. __________________________________________

Professional Goal(s): What do you hope to do when you finish graduate school? __________________________________________

Previous exposure to Gestalt therapy, including reading, workshops, personal counseling, etc.? ________________________________

What are some things that you enjoy in your spare time – interests and hobbies? ________________________________

What are some of the qualities you look for in a friend? ________________________________

What would you like to change or improve about yourself? ________________________________

Identify 1 or more difficult situations in your life (past or present) ________________________________

Identify something UNIQUE about you or your life experiences ________________________________

If you could change something(s) about yourself or your life, what would you like to be different? ________________________________

BEST TIMES in your schedule to meet for an hour in out-of-class Gestalt Dyad Practice Sessions:
Mondays _____ Tuesdays _____ Wednesdays _____ Thursdays _____
Fridays _____ Saturdays _____ Sundays _____

Commentary I:
Gestalt Pedagogy – Creativity in Teaching

M. Willson Williams, Ph.D.

I am moved by Dr. Ansel L. Woldt’s description of his experience with using Gestalt practices to inspire his students’ creative expression, and delighted to share my thoughts as stimulated by his article on “Gestalt Pedagogy – Creativity in Teaching.” Invoking the word “creativity” in an educational setting can be complicated. As Woldt notes, if we can unlock our creative energies, we can broaden and deepen our therapeutic efficacy. Indeed, engaging the creative process can help us loosen the constraints that typically bind our worldview, and aid us in reaching beyond our real or self-imposed limitations. But it can also be daunting to do so. Woldt has given us an idea of how we can move beyond that intimidation through the use of a pedagogy rooted in the concepts of Gestalt therapy.

I think we would agree that bringing the creative process into teaching is something to which we aspire. However, there are times when that can be scary to the graduate student who has yet to develop a secure therapeutic identity. (Or to the educator who is unsure of his or her pedagogical prowess.) Woldt’s clear and elegant suggestions about how to integrate Gestalt practice into the classroom or training setting are a great help to all of us in higher education.

As I look back some 30 years to my master’s and doctoral degree experiences, I realize that “creativity” was not something that was overtly fostered in either program. My master’s program was strictly Rogerian in orientation, and anything off that course was discouraged. The only “B” I received in my

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