TRAINING COUNSELLORS IN GESTALT METHODS

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Abstract

A training program in the use of the Gestalt two chair method is presented. This approach is based on three components, a knowledge component, a skill training component and an integrating component. The principles of two chair work and the micro- counselling skills required for this training are described and the training approach for their use is discussed. The major themes covered in the training program are outlined and the major Gestalt concepts of awareness, figure/background, introjection, retroflection and projection are discussed. Some of the specific exercises used in the training are presented. In addition, the importance of training the whole person in both skills and attitudes and awareness is discussed.

Résumé

L'article explique un programme de formation pour l'utilisation de la méthode des deux chaises du Gestalt. Elle est basée sur trois éléments: la connaissance, la formation de compétences et l'intégration. L'article explique les principes de la méthode des deux chaises et les compétences de micro-consultation requises pour la formation ainsi que la méthode de formation pour l'utilisation. Les idées importantes traitées dans le programme de formation sont résumées et les importants concepts du Gestalt, être conscient du soi-même, le figure-fond, l'interjection, la rétroflexion et la projection sont expliqués. Certains des exercices spécifiques à l'utilisation en formation sont présentés. En plux, on explique l'importance de la formation complète de la personne dans les domaines des compétences, des attitudes et d'être conscient du soi-même.

There is a pressing need in counsellor education to develop effective means to train people in active intervention methods. Many students want to be more initiating and are attracted to more active models. Trainees wanting to be more active and effective, however, often move too quickly or too intrusively into directing client exploration and attempting to stimulate deeper experiencing. Deeper experiencing can lead to discoveries and change (Gendlin, 1969; Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951; Rice, 1974) but counsellors require explicit training in methods to deepen experience and promote awareness.

The Gestalt approach appears to have much to offer in the way of active skills to promote client awareness, experiencing and responsibility through methods which emphasize self-confrontation, nonverbal expression, and sensory awareness (Coven, 1978; Stevens, 1970). In particular the success of the Gestalt two chair method in promoting client awareness and responsibility has begun to be demonstrated (Bohart, 1977; Greenberg, 1975; Greenberg & Clarke, 1979; Greenberg & Rice, in press). What is needed is a systematic approach to training counsellors in this Gestalt method.

The Two Chair Experiment

Gestalt therapists have invented a number of interventions designed to stimulate and deepen clients moment by moment experiencing. Probably, the most widely used Gestalt method is the two chair experiment (Levitsky & Perls, 1970; Passons, 1975). Greenberg (1979) has specified client expressions which are positive indicators for the use of the two chair experiment. These client expressions, which are essentially statements of conflict made by the client during counselling, were called splits. A split is a statement presented by a client in counselling in which two parts of the self (P1 and P2) are verbally set in opposition to each other. This statement is accompanied by a contradiction indicator (C) setting the two parts in opposition and some verbal or nonverbal indicator of a struggle (S)., e.g., "Part of me (P1) wants to do this *but (C) I'm not sure* (S) I (P2) totally want to go along with that part."

The following principles underlying the use of the two chair method have been described (Greenberg, 1979): 1) *Recognizing splits:* One of three types of splits, conflict, subject/object or attribution, is identified by the counsellor, 2) *Establishing a contact boundary:* The counsellor establishes

and maintains clear separation and contact between the partial aspects of the self, 3) *Attending:* The counsellor directs clients' attention to particular aspects of their present functioning in each chair, 4) *Responsibility:* The counsellor directs clients to use their abilities to respond as the agent of their experience in each chair, 5) *Heightening:* The counsellor intensifies aspects of experience by increasing clients' general level of arousal in each chair, and 6) *Expressing:* The counsellor instructs clients to make actual and specific that which is intellectual or abstract by *doing* what is being talked about in each chair.

Excerpts from a two chair dialogue demonstrating these principles are presented below.

Excerpt 1

C I don't know (S) if I want to stay at school. I (P1) want the freedom of a job *but* (C) I (P2) think staying at school might be better for me in the long run *(conflict split)*.

T Would you like to try something? Sounds to me like there are two parts of you. One side wants to get a job and the other stay at school. Would you sit in this chair and be one part and talk to the other part in this chair *(establishing a contact boundary)*.

C O.K. In this chair I'm the part that wants a job.

As the dialogue unfolds the parts change and develop and in the following excerpt we see the emergence of what Perls (1969) referred to as the Top Dog/Underdog dialogue.

Excerpt 2

T Become aware of what you are doing with your hand as you say "You are lazy" *(attending)*.

P1* I'm point my finger scolding.

T Will you do this again and exaggerate what you are doing *(heightening)*?

P1 You're a bad person — you'll never make anything of yourself (pointing vigorously).

T Change. What does the other part say *(maintaining a contact boundary)*?

P2* It depresses me.

T Will you say I *(responsibility)*.

P2 I feel depressed and inadequate.

T What do you want? *(responsibility)*. Tell this part *(maintaining a contact boundary)*.

P2 I want you to leave me alone. I can make it (voice quivers).

T What are you feeling? *(attending)*.

P2 Scared.

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*Part 1 and Part 2

T Come over here and scare yourself. What do you say to yourself to make yourself feel shaky? *(maintain a contact boundary and expressing)*.

P1 You'll never make it.

T Be specific. How do you scare yourself (expressing)?

P2 You're too shy. You'll never even be able to get a job. You're too lazy, if you got a job you wouldn't be able to do it.

A number of component skills have been specified and described under each principle (Greenberg, 1979) and these formed the basis for the skill training aspect of the program presented below.

The general skills required in the use of the two chair technique are:

1) Creating "here and now" experiments,
2) Making process inquiries,
3) Making process suggestions,
4) Making behavioral observations, and
5) Giving experiential feedback.

These skill categories are broken down into a set of specific micro-skills in Table 1. These micro-skills, when learned together with the principles of two chair work, allow for systematic skill training in Gestalt methods.

The principles of two chair work provide a broad definition of counsellor function. The skill categories define five classes of counsellor behavior used in the two chair experiment: creating, inquiring, suggesting, observing and giving feedback. The micro-skills define specific counsellor behaviors which can be used at different times to achieve different functions, e.g., the micro-skill of making an affect inquiry — What are you feeling? — could serve the function of establishing a boundary between parts, of promoting attending or of promoting responsibility.

Gestalt training has not yet described such functions or skills in detail. To date individual awareness and growth, and the attendant attitude change, have been emphasized as the primary vehicle of training in the Gestalt approach. It is clear, however, that counsellor training has benefited from the specification of micro-counselling skills (Ivey, 1971). Clear specification of skills makes learning easier and quicker and tends to reduce the sense of mystification that is often experienced by trainees when observing complex interventions. However, as Mahon and Altman (1977) have pointed out "focusing on skills is not enough" because counselling is a "dynamic process where being helpful depends upon how individuals use their self." In the training program presented below the teaching of specific skills is integrated with a training of the whole person in the "use of self." Attention is given in this training to experi-

TABLE 1
Specific Micro-skills to use with the two chair method of counselling.

Skill Category	Specific Skill	Actual Behavior
Here and now experiments	Recognizing splits	It seems like there are two parts.
	Directing person to "get a sense" of the different parts	What are you like as your strong part?
	Identifying differences	What are your differences?
	Directing the person to "make contact" with the other part	Say this to the other part.
Process inquiries	Affect inquiry	What are you feeling or experiencing?
	Desire inquiry	What do you want?
	Expectation inquiry	What do you expect or anticipate?
	Avoidance inquiry	What are you avoiding?
	Awareness inquiry	What are you aware of?
	Expression inquiry	What are you doing? or How you doing this?
Process suggestions	Language suggestion	Say "I" instead of "it."
	Attending suggestion	Become aware of your voice.
	Focusing suggestion	Go inside. What are you experiencing?
	Demand suggestion	Tell the other part what it should do.
	Identification suggestion	Become your voice, your judge, etc.
	Specificity suggestion	Will you be more specific?
	Exaggeration and repetition suggestion	Say this again. Exaggerate it.
Behavioral observation	Behavioral observation	I'm aware that you are speaking softly.
Experiential feedback	Feeding a sentence	Will you try on, "I want to be loved."
	Personal awareness statements	I'm aware of feeling touched, of losing interest.
		My hunch is you're feeling like you want to hide. Does that fit for you?

ential work to increase the trainees awareness of themselves as well as to skill training. The combination of experiential and skill training helps to embed the skills in personal experience and thereby helps to ensure the integration of the skills. In addition, in the experiential work, trainees are encouraged to become aware of their personal style of relating so that they can utilize the knowledge of how they effect others in their counselling.

Training Program

Skills which exist in a vacuum are, at best, ineffective and, at worst, could be used mechanically and without sensitivity. Having extracted the micro-skills of two chair work from the complex performances of skilled Gestaltists, it was necessary for effective training to re-embed them in the appropriate theoretical and experiential contexts. A training model with three components, a knowledge component, a skills component and an integrating component was therefore devised for training counsellors in the two chair method. In the knowledge component provision was made for both "knowledge about" and "knowledge of acquaintance" (James, 1890), i.e., theoretical and experiential knowledge. The trainees developed their intellectual awareness at a level as close to practice as possible in that the theoretical material was presented as an advanced origanizer to help

assimilate experiential material from the same session. In the skills component of the training program skills were taught in a failure free environment, one skill at a time. The integrating component involved trainee personal growth, modelling of the use of the experiment by the trainer and practice in the total experiment by the trainees.

The basic training program consisted of a minimum of twelve group sessions and four supervision sessions. The group sessions were based on those theoretical themes of the Gestalt approach which are relevant to two chair work. In addition, in each session a principle of two chair work which was related to the theoretical theme plus the skills with which the principle could be implemented were taught. An overview of the content of the training sessions is provided in Table 2. As much as was possible the structure of the sessions followed a similar format. Sessions began with a theoretical lecturette on the theme accompanied by experiential exercises to help make the theory personally relevant. This was followed by the skill training component of the session which involved the discussion of a principle of two chair work and the demonstration and practice of some of the micro-skills which could be used to implement the principle.

TABLE 2

Principles, Themes and Skills related to the two chair method.

Themes	Principles of two chair work	Specific skill
Awareness	—	Awareness and affect inquiries Attending suggestion
Introjection	Conflict split and Maintaining a Contact Boundary	Recognizing split, getting a sense of parts, making contact
Retroflection	Subject/Object split Responsibility	Affect and desire inquiries Language and demand suggestions
Figure/Background	Attending and Heightening	Awareness inquiry, attending and focusing suggestion, exaggeration and repetition suggestion
Projection	Attribution splits	Recognizing attribution of conflict, recognizing attribution of agency
Process, Structure and Feedback	Expression	Expression inquiry, specificity suggestion, behavioral observations, personal awareness statements

THEMES AND PROGRAMS CONTENT

Awareness

Lecturette and Experiential Exercises. The first training session begins with a "here and now" based awareness exercise. Each member of the group is asked to say how he or she feels "right now," in order to focus on actual present experiencing. This provides an opportunity right at the start to experience the vitality of the process of awareness. A lecturette is then provided on different aspects of awareness. A discussion of Perl's three zones of awareness (1969) and the difference between thinking and sensing is followed by another experiential awareness exercise. An exercise is used in which people in dyads share present awareness and present imagining and explore different aspects of their own awareness (Passons, 1975; Stevens, 1970).

Skill Training. Counsellor skills which are designed to aid client awareness are the first to be introduced in the skill training. Client and counsellor dyads are formed and the clients are instructed to talk about recent unfinished situations. The counsellors are instructed to refrain from reflecting. In place of reflecting content or feeling, counsellors ask their clients to become aware of their present experiencing. The distinction between "talking about" and "experiencing" is thereby clarified at this early stage in the training process. The counsellor inquires into the client's present state by saying, "What are you aware of as you say this?," or "What are you feeling right now?" The micro-skills being taught in this exercise are *awareness inquiries* and *affect inquiries.* Use of these micro-skills highlight the presence of the inner process that accompanies content. In addition, this exercise provides the first experience for the counsellor in engaging in a directive inquiry style.

Following this exercise the roles are changed and the counsellors are asked to bring to awareness visible phenomena, such as gestures or hand movements that their clients may be making while they are talking. This is done by utilizing an *attending suggestion,* e.g., "become aware of what you are doing with your hands, eyes, mouth, etc." Again process is emphasized over content and the counsellor has an experience in timing a suggestion and having to interrupt the client verbalization to bring something to awareness.

Introjection

Lecturette and Experiential Exercises. First a brief lecture on introjection (Perls, *et al.,* 1951) is given. Perls' notion of Top Dog and Underdog and the self-manipulation game are presented. The dialogue between the "bullying authoritarian" part of the personality and the "sabotaging avoiding" part is demonstrated in a role play. The function of introjection in the creation of conflict is discussed and the importance of separating the two parts of a conflict into the introjected "shoulds" and the organismic "wants" is stressed.

The basic process of introjection and the method by which it is resolved in the two chair process is exemplified by an exercise focusing on the tyranny of "should" by which many people govern their lives (Stevens, 1970). Other exercises involving awareness of "shoulds" and Top Dog/Underdog dialogues are used if time permits.

Skill Training. The definition of a *conflict split* is provided and the first principle of two chair work *separation and contact* is presented. Briefly the trainer discusses the idea that clients often

present splits characterized by two parts in felt conflict, e.g., "I am not sure if I want to get married and have kids or continue at my school," "I just can't seem to decide" or "I should work harder but I just can't get going, I don't know what to do." The fundamental skill in dealing with splits is the setting up of the experiment by separating the two parts into different chairs and having them make contact or begin a dialogue. The first micro-skill emphasized in the creation of this experiment is the skill of *getting a sense of yourself* — getting each side to describe itself and what it is like by saying, "get a sense of what this part of you is like; tell me who you are as this part." The second skill emphasized is the skill of getting the parts to *make contact* — instructing the parts to talk to each other rather than to the counsellor by saying "tell this to your other part."

Client, counsellor and observer triads are formed to practice the skills. The first experience is made as easy and error free as possible by asking the person in the client role to take responsibility for separating out the parts and conducting their own dialogue and having the counsellor merely occupy the role of counsellor without the responsibility for doing anything. Clients unfold their own dialogues and the counsellor has only to be aware of what it feels like to be in that role and make observations on client process. The observer similarly observes and the experience is then discussed.

Clients are then asked to express a conflict split to their counsellor and the counsellor engages in paraphrasing the felt split to insure that the client feels understood and that the counsellor understands the issue. The counsellor must then find an appropriate time to create the experiment and *recognize the split* by observing that, "it seems like there are two part of you" and identifying and locating the parts in two chairs. This followed by the *getting a sense of* and *made contact* interventions.

The whole group meets to discuss this experience. From the discussions the importance of using the clients' descriptions of unique parts to capture the essence of the conflict is emphasized. The counsellors are encouraged to direct their clients to make contact with their imagined other parts rather than to seek understanding from the counsellor. Contact between parts of the self rather than between counsellor and client is stressed as a vehicle of change and the potential medium for facilitating self-acceptance which comes about by literally "listening to oneself" in the two chairs. In addition the importance to the whole experiment of getting a true felt sense of the opposition in the conflict is emphasized. The counsellor discourages the client from "talking about" the conflict or the parts and encourages the actual experiencing, here

and now, of the two different tendencies or parts. Identifying the opposed forces correctly is the major task for both counsellor and client in the creation of this experiment.

Retroflection

Lecturette and Experiential Exercise. Perls' notion of retroflection, the turning back of activity against the self, is presented and the role of the musculature in the squeezing of the jaw, the neck, the throat, etc. is discussed (Perls, *et al.,* 1951). This topic can be explored at various depths depending on time and interest but the essential concept to be conveyed is that of activity against the self. The importance of people taking responsibility for what they do to themselves as the first step toward change is stressed.

The fact that people "do things to themselves" is explored experientially by asking students to become aware of how they interfere with their own integrated functioning as witnessed in statements like "I judge myself, I hold myself back, I frighten myself, I pressure myself, I egg myself on, etc." The students are asked to pair up and one of the pair is designated as "the self." The other members of the dyad then proceed to enact what they do to themselves, on their partner. They are instructed to actually "do" things to their partner both verbally and physically and not just "talk about" what they do to their partner. They proceed to experience themselves as active agents of their own distress by "sitting on" their partners, "dragging them" around the room, "squeezing" their necks and "barraging" them with criticism, etc. This is usually a highly enjoyable and illuminating exercise which by the embodiment inculcates in the trainees the Gestalt "mentality of responsibility" that it is *I* who am responsible for much of my own experience.

Skill Training. The definition of the *Subject/Object split* is presented and the second principle of two chair work *Responsibility* is discussed. Briefly the trainer presents the observation that often clients make statements in counselling characterized by the fact that they are split into being both subject and the object of their statements, e.g., "I dislike myself," "I watch myself."

It is pointed out that having separated the sides in this and other splits it is important to get the person to take responsibility for their experience in each chair, i.e., to respond in accordance with the true nature of their experience in that chair. The micro-skills of affect and desire inquiries and language and demand suggestions are emphasized as ones which promote the taking of responsibility in each chair. A language exercise in which trainees experiment with the use of sentence beginning

with "it", "you," "we," and "I" respectively is used to ground this skill in experience (Passons, 1975; Stevens, 1970).

Triads are again formed with client, counsellor and observer. The clients are asked to express a split and the counsellor sets up the two chair experiment and focuses on the use of one of the responsibility micro-skills, like language suggestions. The observer is asked to be alert to possible responsibility interventions. The notion of the observer as a "surrogate" counsellor to whom the counsellor may turn for assistance is introduced at this point. This provides some needed support for beginners who are often overwhelmed by the complexity of the client stimulus material and their responsibility as moment by moment initiators.

In the group discussion following the feedback in the triad several issues are discussed. The idea of the appropriate timing of interventions within the dialogue so as to promote experiencing rather than cause "diffusion" of experience is discussed. Clients whose counsellors intervene too slowly or infrequently "talk about" their experience whereas those whose counsellors intervene too quickly and too often without allowing a theme to develop report feeling scattered and confused without meaning developing from their experiencing.

Figure/Background

Lecturette and Experiential Exercises. The fundamental importance of awareness as the source of experiencing is stressed. The figure background principle of perceptual functioning is discussed and the two principles of attending and heightening which function to sharpen awareness are introduced. In the attending session, awareness exercises, emphasizing nonverbal communication both in body and voice are used. Steven's (1970) and Gendlin's (1969) focusing exercise is given to emphasize inner attending. Body exercises (Fadiman and Frager, 1976) of hitting a pillow or shouting "yes-no" or "I will — you won't" are used as a heightening exercise to increase the general level of arousal. An exaggerated role play exercise is also used (Stevens, 1970) to experience heightened awareness of roles.

Skill Training. The *awareness inquiry, attending suggestion,* and *focusing suggestion* micro-skills are practiced and the importance of the client's awareness as the medium of the whole experiment is emphasized. It is stressed that if ever a client or counsellor is confused, a method for getting back to what's important for this client is to simply make an inquiry such as "What are you experiencing?" as the way to heighten awareness and experiencing. The *exaggeration and repetition* skill is practiced as a method of heightening.

Projection

Lecturette and Experiential Exercises. Perl's ideas on projection are discussed and the distinction is made between projection of standards and disapproval (you think I am not O.K.) and projection of feelings and impulses (you feel angry towards me). Projection is described in a non analytic framework as an attribution of one's own thoughts and feelings onto the environment and as a hypersensitivity to minor manifestations of attitudes and feelings in other people (Enright, 1970).

A number of experiential exercises can be used to explore the ideas of projection and attribution (Stevens, 1970). An awareness exercise in which people report their awareness and their imaginings used in the first session can be repeated in order to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between fantasy and reality.

Skill Training. Two attribution splits are discussed. The first is the *Attribution of conflict split* in which clients report opposition from the environment, e.g., "I want to leave school but my father says I shouldn't and I don't know what to do." The second is the *Attribution of agency split* or giving up of one's power, when clients report that their experience is the result of another's actions, e.g., "she made me feel embarrassed." "I need his reasurance."

The triads work on attribution splits utilizing all the skills learned to date. They are now able to introduce other people or parts of the world into the other chair. The process of reowning the attributed part and the tendency for this to often be accompanied by a lot of feelings is discussed.

Process, Structure and Feedback

Lecturette and Experiential Exercises. The importance of discovering the "what" and the "how," the content and the process of experience, rather than the "why," the cause of experience, is discussed. Exercises designed to show how being more specific and becoming aware of how one is doing something are used. In dyads one person is instructed to repeatedly ask the other "what do you want?" and to follow the others answer with a specificity question "please be more specific." This highlights that by becoming more concrete and specific in expression, experience is deepened. The difficult Gestalt intuition, that of becoming aware of "how" one does things, is approached by asking people to become aware of "how" they are doing or just did something, e.g., they are asked "how are you interacting, how did you get what you wanted, etc.?" In discussing feedback it is stressed that it is the medium in this experiment for counsellors to maintain genuine contact with their clients and to share their own awareness, experi-

ences, perceptions and hunches that relate to the client's work.

Skill Training. The skills to be learned relating to expression are those of making an *expression inquiry* and *specificity suggestions* and these are practiced in triads as part of a two chair experiment. In addition the skills of feeding back to the client *behavioral observations* and making *personal awareness* statements are practiced as part of two chair work.

CONCLUSION

This training program is used as an advanced training in active methods with people who have completed an introductory one or two term course in interpersonal skills. It is suggested that this approach be used only with people who have already acquired listening and relationship skills. Counsellors who are unable to respond to clients and manage relationships could initiate with these active methods and be unable to deal effectively with the client material produced.

Students report that there is a high demand for self-disclosure and immediate experiencing in this training approach, in that a context is created in which the counsellor educator can actively stimulate them to explore themselves and what they may be avoiding. With a focus on the sharing of immediate experience the students seem to become more willing to deal with significant issues and present conflicts. In this approach, therefore, the trainer must be willing to give attention to trainees' personal growth. The trainer's work with the trainees throughout the sessions, models the approach and provides material for the discussion of skills and attitudes. Through the training each student works on personal development and on clearing up personally identified areas of confusion. The product of the training is not only trainees with new skills. Trainees in addition report that they have assimilated the underlying attitudes necessary to implement the skills effectively and are more aware of their personal styles and how these effect their counselling.

Training in the two chair method adds a new dimension to counsellor training. Training to date has focused predominently on the interpersonal skills of responding, understanding and action. The use of Gestalt skills provides counsellors with the opportunity to deepen client experiencing and promote perceptual discovery by the use of a new set of active stimulating skills (Greenberg & Kahn, 1978; Greenberg & Kahn, in press). The two chair method which appears to stimulate exploration and so readily promote discovery often appeals to eager trainees as a powerful tool to enhance their counselling. Given its potency it can be used "for better or for worse" and systematic training is essential to ensure its effective usage. The program and skills suggested in this paper are an attempt to take a step in the direction of the provision of disciplined training in the use of the two chair experiment so that it will be used to help people and not to harm them.

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