

The Nature of Gestalt Coaching & Therapy – A Personal Analysis

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***Abstract:** This article describes a reflective inquiry into the respective natures of coaching and therapy through examination of my practice as a coach and therapist. To help capture and compare the influences at play I use a holistic model attuned to physical, social, emotional, imagined and transpersonal reality; perform a reflective inquiry; court opinions of current and past clients; profile my facilitation style in coaching and therapeutic settings. Finally field analysis is performed to summarise my findings. I hope this paper will stimulate discussion within the Gestalt community regards the relative strengths, limitations and opportunities available within coaching and therapy, plus the gains and costs of integrating or moving between the two. I also trust you will be encouraged to perform practitioner research yourself.*

Coaching & Therapy – Chalk & Chalk or Chalk & Cheese?

I begin this inquiry feeling somewhat conflicted. Glibly, many years ago, I used to compare ‘coaching’ to ‘therapy’ in motor-bike terms – ‘coaching’ was akin to servicing an engine and changing the oil, while ‘therapy’ was comparable to stripping down and re-building the engine. Now I’m not so sure. Much therapy I believe has become over-professionalized, over-clinical and dependent on the status quo to the degree it supports similar social conditions to those that often bring clients to us in the first place. When therapists identify too closely with their host culture and become agents of social control, who is there left to heal those damaged and alienated by Society – coaches?

Coaching has grown exponentially over the past 10 years. It used to be largely behavioural and task-centred, but has of late become ‘process-centred’ and acquired the potential to revitalise much of what had grown stale in therapy while extending into areas therapy has traditionally failed to reach. Simply, coaching has freed psychotherapy from the therapy room and taken it into everyday commercial life. Indeed, what started as mentoring and fitting people into a business context is now a profession in its own right.

Many academics and therapists – like me – who were once dismissive of coaching now teach it, opportunist counsellors and therapists clamour to use it as a money-spinner. Note the cynic in me! Within a very short time coaching has grown into a force to be reckoned with. Initially I was hopeful that coaching might side-step the cultural and political traps that have ensnared therapy, but the signs are not good, for self appointed professional bodies are currently fighting for identity and a lion’s share of the coaching market. In this light any romantic notions I entertain about coaching re-educating Society and side-stepping politics is rapidly disappearing down the pan!

Gestalt is so much more than a clinical tool. It’s championing of Humanistic and Eastern values, coupled with its potential to conduct powerful phenomenological inquiry, have caused many of us to use it as a model for holistic education, personal

development, research inquiry, organisational development, spiritual inquiry and much more. Yet many recently trained therapists don't get Gestalt's counter-cultural position nor appreciate this wider territory. Schooled to its clinical benefits rather than its radical humanistic philosophy, they often see such as 'authenticity' more in Rogerian person-centred terms than the uncompromising Zen-like stance portrayed in Fritz's courageous autobiography 'In and Out the Garbage Pail' (Perls 1970) – they are a generation or more beyond bare-foot psychotherapy and the social revolution that fermented Gestalt. I wish to correct this slide by emphasising Gestalt's radical post-modern questioning of everything, its phenomenological exploration which facilitates awareness rather than answers, its preference for experiential learning and 'being in the world' rather than 'theorising about the world'. All those things that shone more brightly from Gestalt before it evolved from a 'movement' to a 'method'. This is the bias I carry in to this paper and its inquiry.

Towards an Experiential Model of Facilitation – The Field in Frame

Over the past twenty years I've spent a good deal of time applying Gestalt to personal and professional development, facilitation training, organisational consultancy and team-building – areas more commonly associated with coaching. Alongside this I have maintained a thriving clinical practice. These days as many coaches and consultants use me for supervision as do therapists. But how different – if at all – am I in a coaching or a therapeutic setting? Does each demand a differing facilitative presence and style? I will view these questions through the lens of a holistic model of relating originally crafted from doctorate study (Barber 1990) and tested by participants of numerous practitioner-centred programmes, which identifies both the laminations of reality and phases of relationship that flavour a facilitator-client relationship.

The model in question has two dimensions. The first dimension describes relational development through time. It grew from out study of a four stage model of mental nursing (orientation, identification, exploitation, resolution) suggested by Hildegard Peplau (1952) who was influenced by the writings of Harry Stack Sullivan – a relationally alerted psychoanalyst. Before she died Peplau gave her blessing to the direction I was taking her work. What I eventually arrived at was a 6 phase model which moved sequentially through the following phases:

Pre-Contact: An imaginative impression forms (Envisioning - here individuals seek to address the question - "So what might happen next?")

Orientation: The potential relationship & the working partnership are considered (Acclimatising – here the imagined relationship is compared to the actual one that begins to unfold; each orientates to the reality and world view of the other; the potential for empathy and trust are assessed and individuals attempt to answer the question - "So can we work together?")

Identification: Tasks are defined & a working contract is created (Planning – here rapport is established and rules of engagement are negotiated; problems and tasks are identified; working hypotheses are posed and approaches are suggested and agreed upon and individuals raise to mind - "How might we work together?")

Exploration: Experience is Engaged and Experiments Performed (Acting & Observing – here boundaries are laid and tested and a safe environment is created;

awareness is raised towards a developing theme and engaging practical experiments; support is mobilised, fantasies are checked and awareness of the moment is heightened and individuals seek to answer the question - “What needs to happen now?”)

Resolution: Findings and Results are Evaluated (Debriefing & Evaluating – here earlier working hypotheses are appraised; a debriefing of events and their prospective meaning is performed; mapping of the inquiry to date is made and future routes are considered and individuals address the question - “What were the gains and costs of this relationship?”)

Post-Contact: Out of contact again with the real experience imagination is left to shape the relationship (Remembering - here individuals reflect upon the question - “So what did this experience mean to me?”).

At the micro level the above phases can frame the inquiry of a single therapy or coaching session; at the macro level they can account for evolutionary stages of a whole course of therapy or coaching. This dimension alerts us to developmental nature of the client-facilitator relationship while drawing attention to the organic cycle of inquiry social relationships enshrine.

The second dimension of my model illuminates the cluster of experiential realities at play in the human condition. It arose from doctoral study into group facilitation (Barber 1990) and an examination of how various schools of therapy, especially Gestalt, Humanism, Psychosynthesis, Transactional Analysis and Group Analysis addressed the human condition. From this review five primary experiential levels or zones of reality were identified. In the example below the descriptions are attuned to facilitation within a helping relationship:

At the Physiological/Sensory level (‘physical reality as perceived via our senses’) we attune to the behaviours people and groups co-create in their dialogue between the physical world and their sensory perceptions. Here I seek to create a healthy, motivating and stimulating environment, attend to physical energy while encouraging physical expression and active exploration. Individuals and groups I find often learn in a trial-and-error way here as they quench their physiological needs, experiment with support and seek to conquest ever more physical skills and territory.

At the Social/Cultural level (‘reality as it is intellectually conceived and conventionally taught to be’) we find a structured level of functioning informed by cultural rules and intellectual theories. Here I build a relational container to support a learning culture in which participants can explore and meet their social needs, identify blocks to communication and experiment with new relational strategies. Educational interventions designed to shape group culture or clarify task and purpose occur here. At this level people learn through social identification, imitation and by role modelling others.

At the Emotionally/Transfential level (‘emotional and biographical aspects of reality’) we may use more ‘therapeutically’ inspired or psycho-dramatic interventions. Here I invite expression of emotional energies and exploration of emotional agendas. Interventions designed to manage, direct and release pent-up emotions are focussed here, as are facilitative actions designed to raise awareness to the historical emotional patterns (transferences) that drive behaviour.

At the Imagined/Projective level (‘life as fantasised and imagined to be’) we experience a shadowy area which is largely unconscious but may be gradually

brought to consciousness through pattern recognition. Here I might set about challenging collusion, exploring blind-spots and surfacing the hidden agendas I see being acted out individually and collectively. At this level people and groups often need to be educated to the archetypes, projections, metaphors and myths that drive them.

At the Intuitive/Transpersonal level ('reality as spiritually guided') are included interventions directed towards illuminating a person, group or community's ecological interdependence and tacit connection to influences over and above themselves. Here I might draw attention to a person, group or community's essential uniqueness, or work towards envisioning their greater purpose (Dharma) or latent potential. People at this level learn intuitively, as when a flash of insight suddenly makes clear something that has lain out of awareness.

Each of the above 'phenomenological realities' flow together to co-create our 'life-space'; they describe something of the paradoxical nature of people, teams and organisations plus the complexity we meet. They help us focus our Gestalt interventions to a purpose – upon elements of the field currently out of awareness.

Each level requires very different qualities of engagement, ways of 'being' and 'intervening' from ourselves as facilitators. For instance, at the physical/sensory level we need to attune to our own physicality and exercise our sensory acuity if we are to read our clients energetically; at the social/cultural level we need to handle our relational influence and the authority attendant to our professional role with sensitivity; at the emotional/transference level we need to be emotionally fluent and monitor the influence of our own emotional trigger points and baggage; at the imagined/projective level we need to be aware of our projections and innermost needs if we are to escape being seduced to feelings of omnipotence; at the intuitive/transpersonal level we need to serve what is authentic and surrender our ego to the degree we can be guided by the fertile void and a sense of higher purpose.

How I Envisioned Inquiry – And What Actually Happened

In contemplating a study of things Gestalt, phenomenological inquiry came naturally to mind. Phenomenological inquiry, akin to Gestalt, suggests that what appears in consciousness is phenomenon – something 'perceived' rather than 'as it really is', and likewise views personal experience and the construction of individual meaning as paramount. I will use Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas 1990) as the specific phenomenological tool to guide me through a reflective journey composed of the following stages: *Initial engagement*: I embark on a deep personal questioning of what precisely I wish to investigate relating to coaching and therapy to awaken my interest and passion in the subject; *Immersion*: I live, dream and merge with my research question – 'What is my experience of giving and performing coaching and therapy?' in the hope I will begin to appreciate both intuitively and intellectually intimate effects of the field; *Incubation*: I allow the inner workings of intuition to clarify and extend my tacit understanding of the subject as I watch what percolates to awareness; *Illumination*: I review all the data acquired from my own experience and that of my co-researchers to expand my awareness, identify hidden meanings and refine the resulting integrating framework until my product forms a comprehensive fit with experience; *Explication*: I attempt to put to full examination and to explain what

has awakened in consciousness, in an attempt to capture and familiarise myself with the layers of meaning that surround coaching and therapy, inclusive of the universal qualities and deeper meanings that contribute to the phenomenological whole; *Creative synthesis*: I integrate my findings, inclusive of arguments for and against the particular propositions I have surfaced, with a view appreciating the real significance of what people actually experience. It strikes me that reflective research of this sort, which illuminates knowledge from out of passion and presence (Moustakas 1990), has much in common with Gestalt and how we, as practitioners, refine and communicate our awareness to clients.

Armed with the aforementioned phases of Heuristic Inquiry as a guide I began an electronic diary in which I jotted down current observations, notes from readings and snatches of conversations with co-researchers (clients/colleagues), dreams, meditations and thoughts and feelings emitting from practice. Continuing my usual duties as coach and therapist I noticed a renewed curiosity, and quickly I realised I had been in the midst of a naïve Heuristic Inquiry into the merits of coaching and therapy for many years, long before the incentive to write this paper. For instance, as I evoked the phase of initial engagement blurred images and uneasy bodily sensations arose in quick succession. As I progressed deeper memories jumped out, re-affirming my belief that something akin to immersion relating to the relative merits of coaching and therapy had been ongoing long before this study. I guess I was re-surfacing a latent store of ‘experiential knowing’ born from earlier incubation – for in no time I was propelled into illumination. I wrote down everything that burst to mind – and in the process reaffirmed the feeling I had already lived this inquiry at a tacit un-verbalised level. I am reminded here of how within the first day of a workshop I’m often unclear and tentative in my facilitation, and that by the second day an intuitive body of knowledge arises to support me. So it was with this research, the more I attuned the more was released as more unexpressed and un-recognised ‘experiential knows’ came into view!

Once I built up momentum, had awakened my ‘embodied wisdom’ and reached the incubation stage I began to feel limited by my Heuristic Inquiry headings – the signposts got in the way. Experientially, there was no real completion to some phases, just a naturally evolving and increasing depth, as if I was cycling from inner knowing to outer observation and expression and back again. In hindsight, the phase of initial engagement and immersion, and the last phase of creative synthesis felt comfortable enough standing alone, but incubation, illumination and explication were so intimately connected I found myself cycling around them many times. Gradually a solution dawned; I needed to place the stages of Heuristic Inquiry to where they developmentally belonged, namely: orientation (initial engagement), identification (immersion), exploration (incubation; illumination; explication) and resolution (creative synthesis). With this in place I felt liberated to go round the incubation-illumination-explication loop many times – rather than once and for all, deepening and expanding my vision with each cycle. In this way I found freedom within the Heuristic form rather than moved beyond it.

Below are a few of the more significant reflections from my research diary of what I experienced at each Heuristic stage within the developmental phases of my inquiry.

Insights arising from the Orientation Phase of my Inquiry:

Initial engagement – I realise as I start out that I have reflected upon the commonality and difference of coaching and therapy for many years – as so many earlier ruminations and forgotten memories have come crowding in. I recall, early in my career seeing coaching as a pale reflection of therapy. As ‘feelings’ were not kosher in the business community I suspected therapy had been dressed up as coaching! That coaching was a ruse. Later in my career I saw coaching as an educational intervention. But at root, such was my therapeutic bias I deemed coaching at worst a superficial scratching of the surface, and at best akin to training. Since this time I have noticed a more positive value creeping into my vision.

Over the past few years I have reviled therapy’s elitism and professional identification with the status quo, and begun to venerate coaching as somewhat healthier in its ‘normalising’ of the helping relationship. Pendulum-like I find myself swinging still between the negative and positive of coaching and therapy alike. I note I am passionate around being more ordinary with my clients, more transparent about myself, my life and selfhood. My Gestalt is heavily influenced by principles of humanism (empowerment, experiential learning, holism and authenticity) and therapeutic community practice (democracy, communalism, permissiveness and reality confrontation); I have also found I can befriend clients and still be an effective therapist, and that in coaching therapeutic agendas still arise for address. My original boundaries are now less rigid. So I am becoming even more intrigued about ‘the essential difference of a coaching and therapeutic relationship and how I might be different and the same in each’ – which is essentially my research question.

Insights arising from the Identification Phase of my Inquiry:

Immersion – I am now mining deeper into my history by reviewing how I first became a coach, or rather identified with ‘being’ one. In this immersion more memories return. I taught on an MSc in Change for several years which drew to its number many consultants, ‘coaching’ was a term they introduced me to. It seemed to have evolved out of mentorship where an experienced and senior member of an organisation showed a new or junior member the organisational ropes. In these earlier times coaching was performance-centred and prescriptive and had sport-like connotations. I remember a definition of coaching at this time that said it was designed ‘to help both business executives and individuals set and achieve their goals’. Coaching and therapy appeared to me as different as chalk and cheese, and I looked down on coaching. While therapy was holistic, coaching seemed to remain largely within the physical/sensory and social/cultural domains of reality. As my own consultancy role grew my organisational clients started to request coaching of me. As I had taught personal development and group facilitation for many years and was a therapist to boot – I accepted the invite. I was emergent and holistic in my coaching style, informed by Gestalt, group analysis and attentive to field dynamics. Nevertheless the coaching I provided felt more contractual than my therapy or group facilitation. All this was in the early 1980’s. Ten years later coaching was being defined by such leading exponents as Warren Bennis (1989) as giving advice or feedback that may improve the performance of the recipient while maintaining her or his self-esteem. The person as well as their behaviour had now entered the frame.

When I actually started to teach coaching I felt at home with Timothy Gallwey's (2001) description of coaching as the art of creating an environment through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner. As the cultural field caught up with my Gestalt biases I settled more fully into becoming a coach.

In this phase of inquiry as the above memories faded new ideas took their place. This wasn't immersion so much as bombardment as I reflected upon my practice while on the toilet, driving the car, talking to colleagues, walking the streets and whenever my attention tuned out of the here and now! Every chance I had to investigate or compare and contrast coaching and therapy in conversations I found myself taking. The fuse was lit and would not go out.

Insights arising from the Exploration Phase of my Inquiry:

Incubation – Writing after two or more months and well within the second cycle of the incubation-illumination-explication inquiry loop intuitions still percolate thick and fast. I realise I often forget when I'm a coach or therapist, and after the initial orientation and identification phases of a client-practitioner relationship just respond to what is surfacing. Yet there is nevertheless a qualitative difference. Therapy is more regular, more holding, more intimate and intense; coaching a little more objectified, socially and culturally defined and contractual. I am more likely to be surprised in therapy, to meet with confusion more powerfully, to feel at the mercy of processes I am but dimly aware of, to be led by my uncertainty and by influences over and above me – it is more spiritual. And coaching, I guess I feel more educational, clearer in my intention and useful in a practical, male, gender-informed, action-based and problem-solving way!

I am mindful of some coaching clients who later re-negotiated a therapeutic relationship, as if coaching helped raise a deeper level of address, but of none who moved from therapy into coaching. This said, in therapy groups coaching-like interventions can proliferate when we address 'how to' questions, field feedback from group members or rehearse new strategies –but still I sense profound differences remains, although many business types come to me for coaching in areas that shade into counselling. I note a recent trio of highly successful coaching clients who expressed in turn: feeling deadened and bored with life; losing a sense of purpose; wondering what the point of it all is? Coaching is seemingly equated with therapy in some business quarters. I shall watch my group interventions and those of participants more carefully for further evidence of this cross-over. I note I am quite surprised by what I am surfacing here, yet, I'm getting a felt sense of what is a possible distinction between Gestalt coaching and therapy nevertheless!

Illumination - As I review everything I'd previously written about coaching and therapy, rummage through teaching notes and speak to past and present clients, especially those who moved from coaching into therapy or came for therapy after first experiencing me in as a tutor, fresh connections are made. The momentum behind this inquiry is quickening; as if a research-minded witness has awakened and will not rest. Both during and after client contact I find myself reflecting 'How similar is this act of coaching to therapy?' and vice versa, plus 'How different or alike are my

interventions in these areas?’ Placing my observations within the earlier model I would suggest at the pre-contract stage, in coaching and therapy alike, word of mouth referral from current or past clients is the usual point of entry. In the orientation phase of the coaching relationship what strikes me is there is a good deal of talk, verbal exchange being the norm, while in therapy clients emotional silences often prevail. During the identification phase, coaching clients ask many questions and give an abundance of work related detail – they seem eager to impress, justify and to be understood. Therapy clients, conversely, seem more prepared to feel their way – don’t know how I can help but seem relieved to be talking about their issues and to be heard. Re the contract we form, the coaching client is apt to meet irregularly and monthly, the therapy client to meet regularly and weekly. The duration of sessions also varies, a coaching session can be 1-3 hours and may include my observing events in the workplace; individual therapy is usually 1 hour and in the therapy room. Some coaching sessions may take place on the phone, while all therapy is face-to-face. In the exploration stage of coaching clients continue to demonstrate a need to over-inform me and focus on specific events – they strive to intellectually understand and to be intellectually understood. Therapy clients listen and wait and speak of general and unfocussed themes as if haunted by intangibles – they strive to emotionally accept their experiences. In the resolution phase of the relationship as we debrief upon our time together; in coaching our journey of discovery is readily discernable and easily described. The journey through therapy is less tangible and more resistive to verbalisation. As for post contact, coaching clients regularly return as new challenges arise in their life, while therapeutic clients rarely return. In this review I sense a tacit model of coaching and therapy forming, a sort of emergent framework I can take forward for discussion with others, something to put to test and check-out against the ongoing experience of myself and others.

Explication – Finding myself cycling through incubation, illumination and explication for a third time, collecting together everything to date and subjecting it to examination, multiple layers of meaning are triggered and I’m awash with data. To better appreciate the phenomenological ground being surfaced in the relational phases of coaching and therapy and to get at their contrasting natures I pour my findings into the comparative frame below:

Developmental Phases within Coaching and Therapy

Coaching	Therapy
<p><i>Pre-orientation</i></p> <p>Clients are drawn by word of mouth and by my history of having taught several business related Masters or my association with management training organisations or</p>	<p><i>Pre-orientation</i></p> <p>Clients appear drawn to me by word of mouth from past or present clients or by recommendations of counselling tutors whose organisations I’ve taught within or</p>

earlier consultancies. My status and business associations appear important.

Orientation

Clients often arrive trusting in my expertise and seemingly more concerned with my CV and prior experience than any personal qualities I possess.

Identification

Clients often walk in firmly entrenched in a reality informed by the physical world and their senses and attuned to socio-cultural ways of seeing the world, trusting of the status quo and with a clear idea of what they want and need and how they want to use me. Clients often set a future agenda to which they contract in my services alongside others (motivators, business coaches, marketing agents).

Exploration

Clients tend to start at the conventional *social* level but travel more widely and deeply over time. Self esteem is usually

performed staff supervision for. My status appears to count for nought.

Orientation

Clients build trust gradually and assess how accepting and respectful I am, as they express intimate personal details while acutely attuned to my response.

Identification

Client's often walk in heavily influenced by their emotional world and/or trapped in reoccurring patterns or powerful projections rooted in imagination. They are unsure of themselves, often unclear as to what they want and need and feel in the grip of unknown forces. As trust builds many depend on me to make sense of what is happening and look to me to propose a way forward.

Exploration

Clients often start out at the *emotional* and/or *projective* level with a desire to return to a normal level of social function

high, and they often look to increase their skills and insight with a view to developing greater self-support and increased expertise. I feel myself objectified and serving an educative purpose, like a consultant being consulted. The individual's sense of everyday competence remains intact. As a practitioner I feel peer-like and instructive, as if helping a colleague. My intellect and sense-making processes are readily involved and the reality we engage appears clearly in view. We co-create things together, are outwardly directed and often co-create strategic ways forward to test in the workplace. Movement is often rapid and put to test immediately. Action comes first and integration later. Intellectually I feel informed. In terms of the interventions I use I find these to be primarily *clarifying* and *challenging* in the beginning with *supportive* interventions coming somewhat later in the journey. Function and performance inform the culture we co-create.

and self-acceptance – the client is in crisis. They often become more dysfunctional before they re-gain self-support, as the full impact of what was previous beyond their awareness arises, hits them and demands emotional release. As a practitioner I feel parent-like and protective and caring of the vulnerable person before me. I am intimately connected to my client and feel deeply respectful of their process. My emotions and intuition are to the fore as I struggle alongside them to hear the unsaid and meet with the hidden forces and tacit influences we are addressing. We experiment with surfacing inner resources to support them within and beyond therapy. Movement is often slow. Understanding and emotional integration are often attempted in the therapy room prior to adoption in life. Emotionally I feel met. In terms of my interventions I find these to be mainly *clarifying* and *supportive* at the beginning with *challenging* ones coming later. Respect and sensitivity to the human condition inform

<p>Resolution</p> <p>After 1 – 2 years when the client feels they have explored what they desired and acquired what they originally came for or need from me they move on – or if they have surfaced an emotional menu re-negotiate a therapeutic contract or join a therapy group. Clients often rate the success of our work through newly won promotions or contracts and/or newly developed competences and/or improvements in team relationships.</p> <p>Post-contact</p> <p>Clients periodically return to redress current life issues and/or receive consultation on work-based problems.</p>	<p>our culture.</p> <p>Resolution</p> <p>After 3 – 5 years when clients feel sufficiently self-supporting they leave therapy and/or join a group to further integrate their own identity and competence. Clients often rate the success of therapy in relational terms, self with self or self with others, plus their ability to withstand emotional pressures and climates that previously over-awed them.</p> <p>Post-contact</p> <p>Clients rarely return.</p>
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The above diagram, which attempts to tease out and contrast the differences between coaching and therapy was begun in the first incubation-illumination-explication cycle and added to in later cycles.

In the first cycle I examined the relative natures of coaching and therapy through a focus on my own practice, but in the second incubation-illumination-explication cycle with the above synthesis emerging I brought co-researchers into the picture, shared my findings and solicited the reflections of colleagues and ex-clients – adding these to the growing data-bank; in the third cycle I refined my original insights in light of

subsequent observations of all involved. As luck would have it – and I know nothing ever happens by accident, during the second cycle I facilitated a weekend workshop on coaching and counselling and was able to circulate this budding synopsis to participants. In the third cycle I facilitated a 4 day course on coaching and facilitation to an over-seas audience of therapists. The views of some eighty individuals indirectly influence this study, while twenty to thirty influence it directly. For example, periodically in my workshops I facilitated mini-co-operative inquiries into the differences between coaching and counselling. Consistently I shared my observations with others, colleagues and friends who were coaches or therapists, participants in workshops, anyone with an interest in the area. Face-to-face discussion brought up valuable impressionistic data for further contemplation – but email correspondence brought few respondents.

Valuable insights were received from ex-clients who had been sent a copy of the above findings for comment, for example S, who had initially met me some years before in my teaching capacity, who subsequently came to me for coaching and later switched to therapy:

“When I talk to people about you, I tend to: first credentialise, say who are you, how are you qualified, what have you achieved - a Dr, practising psychotherapist and commercial consultant, group specialist, Gestalter; second, give some of your story - psychiatric nurse, worked on tug boats, lecturer and course designer, written books, runs groups, goes on trips to foreign climes to train; third, give an insight into your qualities - grounded through martial arts training, warm hearted and challenging of patterns and beliefs, inclusive, easy to understand, no magic, peer like, humanistic.

When I think about this I think it's because, people are interested in results first, proof of those results second and lastly whether the person is a fit. This is probably arse about face and may say more about our driven culture - fit must surely be a priority, but I think we've got to a point where we so results focussed that we say 'I don't need to like you just make sure the job's done', we also have a culture of people with low social skills at the top of the tree (Alex Ferguson, Alan Sugar, Gordon Ramsay to name a few). I've struggled in jobs where I moved to a new boss that had a different style that I found overly controlling or punishing, so you represent an antidote to that.”

Typical of those from a coaching background S looks to my history to establish my credibility, what I've done and where I've been – external criteria. He suggests people in his circle are primarily 'interested in results', 'proof of results' and 'fit' to the task at hand. In follow-up interview he confirmed that for him 'the person' and 'presence' of a coach and how they handled 'authority' were important to him. He had experienced a critical and shaming father and was sensitised to negative authority. As for the time when he finally realised he needed therapy and his transition into the same:

“I always thought it was largely up to me, that given the right information and skills I could get out of depression – I was coming from a life skill and coaching stance. But then I spoke to my sister and realised how screwed up she'd been and she admitted she'd had years of therapy, I then realised how much I'd forgotten and how I couldn't coach my way out of it”.

S noted in our conversation that since starting therapy things got worse, that he was travelling deeper into his depression, but interestingly, coming out of it quicker. ‘Therapy’ had been largely off his radar until he spoke to his sister. After speaking to her it was something for people like him. Unknowingly, like many from a coaching background he appears to have under-estimated the power of his emotional and imagined or projected worlds. N, who had experienced me as a workshop tutor and coach before entering a therapy group added the following:

“Having experienced you in both modes I would agree that these descriptions accurately reflect how I have found those sessions/ workshops. Reading the descriptions help me understand what is happening for you as the prime ‘holder of the space’ be it in coaching or therapy mode and what it is that you are doing.

The one additional observation/ hunch I might add is how deeply your practice is informed by your nursing background. My sense is that the emotional labour and therapeutic presence/being which lie at the heart of nursing merit a mention as key ingredients of what informs your practice (rather than - to force a distinction-the intellectual categorisation and intervention focus that could be said to be the domain of doctoring/doing).”

Again, the embodied knowledge of the practitioner and their quality of presence comes through. K, a participant on a coaching MSc who first came on a workshop but later joined a therapy group volunteered the following:

“I was gob-smacked on your coaching and counselling workshop with how you coached E. Blew my mind away. I thought I want some that”.

Interviewed as to what exactly what ‘blew his mind’ it appeared to be a combination of my attentiveness to the unfolding process – how I followed minuscule cues of bodily response; what appeared in his eyes to be my intuitive responses – such as when I disclosed what I was imagining and thinking; the quality of my personal disclosure – for instance when I shared what I valued about the person before me. When taken together these appear to relate to the quality of my Gestalt-informed presence.

In relation to the ‘success-minded’ nature of coaching clients, I was informed recently by a consulting colleague that the reason Z, another consultant, said he rated me was because I had the trappings of success:

“...a big house, international clients, had written a book and drove a luxury car with a personalised number-plate”.

I am reminded here that in some business quarters if you charge low fees you aren’t seen to be very good! Perhaps that is why some business coaches charge the Earth?

There is much in the process of phenomenological inquiry and analysis reminiscent of Gestalt. For instance, the Gestalt practitioner and phenomenological researcher alike are encouraged to hold everything in mind, treat all aspects equally, bracket-off premature closure and sense-making and put personal bias aside to allow a field-generated synthesis to emerge. Note how similar the classic form of phenomenological analysis I performed on the written returns of my co-researchers

compares with what we do as Gestalt practitioners, namely: 1) locate within each account key statements or phases relating to the theme under investigation; 2) endeavour to interpret the meanings embodied in what is reported as an informed reader; 3) check whenever possible with informants their own interpretations with your own so as to honour their viewpoint; 4) explore emerging interpretations with an eye to what they were revealing about the essential nature of the theme being examined; 5) take everything forward to weave into a creative synthesis of all that you have experienced especially the main themes. We see here that both Gestalt and phenomenological inquiry court tacit knowledge and intuition.

The above process, within this study, served as an internal check to verify results and to counter-balance my researcher biases. But such soul-searching, appraisal and continual self-questioning and phenomenological analysis felt no stranger to Gestalt. In qualitative research and the territory of Gestalt there are no answers, no certainties – only uncertainty and the as yet ‘unformed fertile void’ to guide us. At the last, for all our clever sciences, intellectual theories and cultural constructions, everything boils down to a ‘felt-sense’ or gut feel as to whether something ‘feels’ really true for us or not.

Having been alerted in feedback to the influence of ‘presence’ I grew more curious about the effect of my facilitative style. I tackled this initially in a series of workshop settings. Generally, I was seen as highly attentive to the physical/sensory; rooted in the intuitive/transpersonal; did not so much set rules at the social/cultural level but encouraged an inquiring culture. I was also described as permissive, non-judgemental, and interested in people and encouraging of exploration. ‘Humour’ along with ‘experimentation’ and a sense of ‘serious play’ were also highlighted. My address of emotional/transferential and projective/imagined realities was seen to be impactful but to command comparatively little workshop time. People shared their fantasies, expressed their tears and fears, held them in awareness but quickly moved on. A strong physical presence coupled with a person valuing and authentic attitude were also seen to prevail, and I wondered how true this workshop profile was for me within coaching and therapy.

I was surprised that although I am always acutely aware of the influence of the emotional/transferential and imagined/projective levels, that participants of my workshops underplayed my address of the same. Possibly what is obvious to me is less than obvious to others? Perhaps I need to share my rationale more? If I’m seeing something others are missing no wonder they view me as intuitive rather than skilled – I’ve always attempted to side-step any guru associations, but, if I’m not sharing my deeper rationale clearly enough I’m in danger of courting the same!

I am reminded of the following feedback from a workshop participant:

“I would advise participants coming to your workshops to go with an open mind and heart and be prepared to make contact with all that you know, not just what you think you know. This connection will enable you to use your own intuitive power to fully benefit both yourself and others.”

Co-researchers also reported their experiences in workshops and coaching and therapy alike, as a meeting with the unexpected, they did not know ‘what’ nor ‘how’ they

were learning at the time, but nevertheless ended up with increased awareness and skills. A coach coming into contact with a therapy workshop offered the following:

“Thanks for last weekend; it's always a pleasure to work with you even if at times the feeling around growth can be painful. Therapeutic work carries that wonderful paradox: so you are in pain? Well, come and experience it more and maybe one day you'll feel better. Not exactly a great sales pitch but millions buy it anyway, eh?”

I guess Gestalt in its loosening of the social world and attention to the whole does much to arouse a client from unconscious incompetence (where they see no reason to change and are unaware of the options) to conscious incompetence (where they are awakened to new challenges of learning), then onwards to a stage of conscious competence (where they feel encouraged to practice new skill or entertain a different reality) and onwards to a stage of unconscious competence (where they can integrate a new way of being). It appeared this process was primarily experiential and non-verbal in therapy and rather more cognitive and understandable in coaching? Note that each of these phases requires a very different facilitative balance of challenge and support.

Because Gestalt is holistic and strives to illuminate what is out of awareness, I am caused to speculate on whether I draw attention to the ‘therapeutic blind-spots’ of coaching and the ‘coaching blind-spots’ of therapy? Reflecting upon this idea further I am reminded of Greenson’s (1967) three tier model of relating which describes:

- A contractual (professional) dimension of relationship (which I see as constructed from physical and social information) which houses a relationships contracted purpose and its social and intellectual agreement; in my eyes this is primarily an ‘I-It’ level of relationship shaped by tasks and informed by social rules.
- An idealised (fantasized) dimension of relationship (which I see as constructed from emotional and projective material), housing emotional, transference and imaginative influences; the shadow of the contractual relationship inclusive of child-parent, top-dog under-dog and sexual game-play; this relationship appears to me primarily a ‘I-I’ one preoccupied with self.
- The authentic (genuine) dimension of relationship (structured in my view from transpersonal values) which portrays who you are at core, the real you from the driver’s seat stripped of all social denial, defence and artifice; this I see as an ‘I-Thou’ relationship valuing of the human condition.

The evidence of this inquiry would suggest that a coaching relationship tends to be instigated by needs informed primarily by the contractual level, while a therapeutic relationship originates from needs stimulated by a desire to understand and contain influences of the idealised one. As for the authentic relationship, for lasting change it seems this must impact coaching and therapy alike – I suspect my co-researcher’s comments about my ‘humanistic presence’ and ‘therapeutic being’ relate to this dimension. As for a Gestalt practitioner pushing into the un-owned shadow-side, if this holds true it is likely in coaching I shine light upon the idealised dimension, and in therapy upon the contractual dimension. Simply, in coaching I tease the socio-cultural world apart to liberate blind-spots while in therapy normalise emotional distress to co-create social support? If true it would appear I’m trying to integrate the

shadow in both areas in an attempt to co-create a more holistic picture. I can probably evidence this speculation another way by examining my facilitative style.

I draw into discussion here a facilitative profile refined from John Heron's (2001) 'Six Category Intervention Analysis'. Note, 'intervention' within this context is defined as a verbal or non-verbal behaviour designed to address a client's current psychological needs and interests. Heron proposes there are six main categories of intervention which fuel two styles of facilitation – 'authoritative' and 'facilitative' (Heron 1989). In the authoritative style a facilitator is largely task-centred and primarily gives advice (prescribes), instructs and interprets (informs), challenges and gives direct feedback (confronts); while in the facilitative style they are more person-centred and work to release emotional tension (cathartic), promote self-directed problem solving (catalytic) and to approve and affirm the worth of a client (supportive).

In character, the 'authoritative style' speaks largely from a position of power, is task driven and has a tendency to be facilitator-centred. By contrast the 'facilitative style' is client-centred and process-centred and describes an emergent style of facilitating. Both styles must be harnessed together in holistic facilitation. Placing the aforementioned interventions into a 'frequency of use' profile, as indicated 0 (never used) - 10 (heavily used), we can create a tool to evaluate our facilitative style. Reflecting on my performance as a coach and therapist and complimenting my observations with that of co-researchers and observers of live demonstrations in coaching and therapy workshops distils the following profile:

Coaching:

Un-Informative	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<u>8</u>	9	10	Informative
Un-Prescriptive	0	1	2	3	4	<u>5</u>	6	7	8	9	10	Prescriptive
Un-Confronting	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	<u>7</u>	8	9	10	Confronting
Un-Cathartic	0	1	<u>2</u>	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Cathartic
Un-Catalytic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<u>9</u>	10	Catalytic
Un-Supportive	0	1	2	3	<u>4</u>	5	6	7	8	9	10	Supportive

Note how informative and educational I appear. But how much of this is due to how I believe 'coaching should be'? I will watch myself more closely to get at an answer here. I glad I'm seen as confronting as I suspect this is connected to my challenging of blind spots – being challenging to the degree the client becomes self-challenging. Catalytic interventions directed towards illuminating insight also figure large, which suggests I endeavour to help people find their own solutions and thus empower themselves. I wonder why I'm located on the lower side of supporting, but then, if I'm challenging what should I expect! Interestingly, regards the shadow side of coaching, cathartic interventions seem particularly underused, while in the therapy example

below cathartic and supportive interventions figure more frequently, suggesting a more person-centred and process-centred style:

Therapy:

Un-Informative	0	1	2	<u>3</u>	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Informative
Un-Prescriptive	0	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Prescriptive
Un-Confronting	0	1	<u>2</u>	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Confronting
Un-Cathartic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<u>8</u>	9	10	Cathartic
Un-Catalytic	0	1	2	3	4	5	<u>6</u>	7	8	9	10	Catalytic
Un-Supportive	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Supportive

Clients also report my becoming progressively challenging as our relationship grew, and rather more supportive during their initial strife. Personally, I experience myself as more client-centred in therapy and more process-centred in coaching.

Overall, my suspicions are supported re my tendency to be more educative and authoritative in coaching and less so in therapy. As suspected I was seen as highly challenging of blind-spots but nevertheless supportive of the person. At later stages of coaching my confronting seemed to retain its frequency but supportive and cathartic interventions increased, supporting the notion that my coaching style travelled into more therapeutic territory over time. Interestingly in therapy, I was seen to become more confronting and informative, supporting the thesis that therapy possibly moved into the normalising territory of coaching over time. This tends to support the notion I bring what is out of awareness into awareness in both modalities. The notion of my becoming a more supportive and confronting presence in the longer term is also supported in profiles generated from workshops facilitated during the life of this study:

Workshops:

Un-Informative	0	1	2	3	<u>4</u>	5	6	7	8	9	10	Informative
Un-Prescriptive	0	<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Prescriptive
Un-Confronting	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<u>8</u>	9	10	Confronting
Un-Cathartic	0	1	2	3	4	<u>5</u>	6	7	8	9	10	Cathartic
Un-Catalytic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<u>9</u>	10	Catalytic
Un-Supportive	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<u>8</u>	9	10	Supportive

Though self-empowering catalytic interventions predominate, I am reminded again of being seen as highly confronting and highly supportive. I'm also aware that when

running experiential workshops I am experienced as more confronting in large groups, more informative in small groups and more supportive one-to-one. How much perception is influenced by group size may be worth considering, but I do admit to experiencing myself as more robust in large groups.

If you are tempted to use this tool to profile your own facilitative style there are a few caveats: facilitators can only profile their intentions but recipients will report the effects; this profile says nothing about a facilitator’s authentic presence or interest in their client – core ingredients of Gestalt; although ‘interventions’ appear distinct they shade into one another. For instance, non-verbally a facilitator might be ‘supportive’ and ‘catalytic’ in their felt presence, yet ‘challenging’ in tone of voice, ‘informative’ in content but ‘cathartic’ or ‘prescriptive’ in how they are received! I believe this is true of me, for what I intend to be catalytic interventions were often seen to be confronting ones. Interestingly, silences were seen by workshop participants and coaching clients to be confronting, though largely supportive by my therapeutic clients.

Insights arising from the Resolution Phase of my Inquiry:

Creative synthesis – So, what better way in a Gestalt inquiry than to return field theoretical principles of organisation, contemporaneity, singularity, changing process and possible relevance to integrate all we have learnt from this study?

How are people and events organised?(Organisation)

Coaching

Therapy

<p>Coaching is heavily embedded in the <i>social</i> world and largely client-directed.</p> <p>Education - rather than deep self understanding or intense experiential inquiry - is generally expected by clients.</p> <p><i>Social</i> conventions are generally accepted by the client rather than challenged and options within the prevailing culture explored, i.e. although formal role-based</p>	<p>Therapy is heavily embedded in the <i>emotional</i> world and robustly client-centred. Personal growth and self-understanding through the deepest of inquiries into self is expected, as is a gradual return to health. Conventions and un-healthy norms are challenged within a supportive relationship. Reality is informed by the prevailing emotional atmosphere</p>
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<p>behaviours are appraised and explored they are generally placed beyond question.</p> <p>Reality is initially informed and developed from out a review and investigation into ‘what is working best’ and ‘what is not working’ within the work-place. Coaches are often associated with tutors and teachers or subject specialists. Clients come expecting knowledge. The clients own professional needs and specialist knowledge-base shape what is offered. Clients are often drawn to coaches who evidence success. Confidentiality is negotiated as appropriate. An exploratory and educative culture is cultivated. The facilitative relationship tends towards being authoritative in style with a high ratio of informative and catalytic interventions.</p>	<p>carried in by the client. Familial roles and emotional patterns are usually examined with a view to illuminating current behaviour. Naïve clients often associate therapists with medicine and doctors and project out similar authoritative <i>transferences</i> and/or <i>projections</i>. Clients expect relief from their symptoms and gauge success in these terms. The therapist’s therapeutic school does much to set the relational tone. Confidentiality is expected as a professional given.</p> <p>Therapists are often recommended by family or friends due to their personal qualities. An intimate culture of care is cultivated. The facilitative relationship tends to be high in cathartic and supportive interventions and to echo a nurturing parental one.</p>
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How do current influences explain behaviour?(Contemporeneity)

<p>Coaches expect a work-facing focus and often bring an expectation of ‘the coach as expert’. The client often seeks to adapt</p>	<p>Clients look for support and understanding and generally come prepared to let go of emotions they have previously withheld.</p>
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<p>more successfully to the social world and status quo they work within. An appreciative inquiry into what works best is usually undertaken. Formality and values associated with the performance culture of the workplace tend initially to skew attention towards conventional notions of ‘progress’, learning and training. Initially, a learning menu may be consciously decided, negotiated and pursued in a strategic way. There may be a flight towards premature closure and understanding by the client. A coaches professional/therapeutic discipline exerts a powerful influence upon what transpires.</p>	<p>The social world and conventional roles are teased apart to liberate new health promoting ones. A phenomenological inquiry into the individual’s human condition is undertaken where earlier behaviours may be evoked and earlier parent-child dynamics emerge for exploration and redress. Learning is often experiential, emotional in character and tends to percolate to consciousness later rather than sooner. So much non-verbal or preverbal learning is at play the client tends to stay within their experience than rush to make sense of it.</p>
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How do unique influences impact current situations?(Singularity)

<p>A client often enters with a mind-set alive to a unique situation within their current work-place. Ideas of function and performance which are shaped by the individual’s unique life history are often to the fore but largely unrecognised. The unstated likes and dislikes of the coach and</p>	<p>A client tends to enter at a time of distress with a unique emotional agenda that has often developed over many years. Idiosyncratic notions of dysfunction and health are often to the fore along with comparison to historical others. The clients transference and therapists counter-</p>
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<p>client although un-discussed nevertheless shape events. Developmentally the coach-client relationship has similarities to an adolescent to adult or father to son mentoring one. The evolving coach-client relationship enables us to appreciate how communication may be valuing of the person and mindful of what constitutes excellence in communication.</p>	<p>transference are apt to exert a powerful influence. Developmentally the relationship feels initially very young and dependent and gradually matures and deepens as the work progresses. The developing therapist-client relationship co-creates a unique opportunity to re-write the earliest of our emotional and behavioural scripts.</p>
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What is in the process of becoming? (Changing process)

<p>The initial focus gives way to a wider and deeper appreciative as movement towards a deepening understanding of self and emotional and social processes accrue. An appreciation of the self in a team dynamic or organisational community is heightened. Illumination of the dynamics and skills of social communication are explored. A growing awareness of what is tacit and hidden from consciousness is on-going – as awareness educated and expanded. The meaning of work and its place in a balanced life is under constant review.</p>	<p>Movement from emotional conflict to self-support and self-acceptance are supported. Appreciations of the influence of family and societal structures upon the self are instigated. Exploration and illumination of the human condition, self actualisation and the possibility to be a fully functioning human being in the world is on-going – in this way personal development and human growth is supported. Clients may work at a pre-verbal level upon issues of trust and belonging. As support is given and accepted and the presenting issue that</p>
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<p>As time progresses what was originally denied or unrecognised enters awareness to allow emotional and projective levels of engagement to be explored. By the close of coaching clients often report being better equipped to manage themselves and their relationships with others.</p>	<p>brought them to therapy subsides, clients come to accept themselves and their emotional life as normal. By the close of therapy clients often report feeling more hopeful, self-supporting, tolerant towards themselves and better resourced.</p>
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What are we blind to or excluding? (Possible relevance)

<p>Deeper emotional and psychological levels of address are initially avoided. Spirituality and transcendent aspects of the human condition are not generally accounted for. Philosophical considerations of the meaning of life and our existential position in the universe plus our deepest feelings around death and our most intimate relationships often go unreported though nevertheless shape events. Covert influences are largely denied in favour of what can be identified and readily understood. The importance and influence of our inner emotional life is often bracketed-off. Clients often prefer to make</p>	<p>Worldly issues relating to every-day life are often displaced in favour of investigation of what is personal and unique. The therapist's deepest concerns and anxieties are usually off agenda. What the therapist reveals in their clinical supervision about the client and the client reveals to their friends remains largely unknown. Much occurs at the non-verbal and out of awareness level than verbally and overtly. Simple solutions and educational remedies tend to be less evident than experiential exploration. Clients are encouraged to act into feelings rather than make sense of them. While</p>
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<p>sense of feelings rather than to engage them. While the coach is educating the client to healthier adaptation the client is educating the coach to the pressures, structures and demands of the commercial world within a specific organisational setting.</p>	<p>eliciting the clients own resources the therapist increases their own appreciation of the person before them as well as the human condition in general; in this way they are in turn nourished through intimate contact and communication with their client.</p>
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Epilogue – My Learning on this Journey

In Heuristic Inquiry, as in Gestalt, we put the experience first and make sense of events later – to hear is to know, to see to believe, to do to understand! And thoughts get in the way. With this in mind I will now perform, post the event, a little literature review to affirm what I have learnt in light of other studies.

This study adds support to the observations of earlier researchers (Garman, Whiston & Zlatoper 2000) that many of the business community see coaching as an alternative to psychotherapy, but it disagrees with the notion that this is because it is a ‘quick inexpensive’ option as the authors suggest, but rather because those who come forward for coaching are inexperienced and uninformed about the differences and benefits of psychotherapy. Observations of Sperry (1996) relating to the difference of coaching and therapy are also broadly supported. Coaching he suggests tends to be present and future focussed, action-orientated, growth and skills centred, confidentiality remains complex, boundaries are flexible and work is around personality issues. Conversely, the focus in he suggests is upon the past, reflection orientated and pathology centred, confidentiality is clear and fixed, boundaries remain rigid and personality issues are worked through and resolved.

Interestingly, Sperry (2004) has drawn a distinction between the mind-set of the coach, therapist and coach-therapist: Coach: proactive, practical, energetic and optimistic, strategic, non-psychologically minded; Therapist: supportive, interpretive, serious, reparative, directly and intentionally psychologically minded; Coach-Therapist: active and facilitative, listens without interpretation, strategic, indirectly psychologically minded. I find here support for my view that Gestalt, with its present orientation and non-interpretive stance is ideally cast for coaching. Remove ‘strategic’ and substitute ‘organic’ and Gestalt fits snugly into Coaching and Coach-Therapist alike. Regards my earlier cynicism that many psychotherapists and counsellors are jumping on the coaching band-wagon, Campbell (2001) makes a similar point.

As for definitions of coaching, having completed this exercise I rather like Tim Gallwey’s (2002) definition of coaching as ‘Performance = Potential minus interference’, which feels Gestalt-friendly, but feel decidedly cold towards notions of

coaching which strive to communicate the organisation's purpose, vision and goals (O'Neil 2000) or cite it should remove obstacles to business practice (Goldsmith, Lyons & Freas 2000), which reek of mentorship and fitting the client into 'the system'. I note my anti-professional bias returning here, plus my belief that Society and its organisations can themselves be as damaged and psychologically diseased as the individuals who come forward for help. So I guess I'm out of step with much coaching. I also recount that many of my clients leave their place of work within 18 months of completing coaching. This happened on an MSc in Change programme I ran for the purposes of culture change in an organisation previously and is as true today for individuals. I think Gestalt, in raising awareness and support frees-up options, lays the foundation and builds energy for 'potential' to be fulfilled – and thus promotes change. As for the kind of coaching Gestalt offers, I pale at such self-important notions as 'executive coaching' and 'life coaching' which seem to trump up their importance by association with leaders and existence, baulk at the terms 'business coaching' and 'managerial coaching' which I see as subject related and tainted by mentorship and prescription, and so describe what I do as 'Emergent Coaching' – as this describes how Gestalt works.

In relation to facilitation style, many facilitators start authoritative and move into a more facilitative style as an individual or the client-system becomes more self-directive. While this makes good horse-sense and has a developmental feel to it, in the reflective light of this inquiry I experience myself as facilitative from the first, sharing my observations and illuminating what is 'invisible' and field-led from the start. I treasure transparency and am quick to disclose my position. I remember a recent snatch of feedback: "I always remember you as being very present in your facilitation, sensitive to others and attuned to their needs – but so very present, always there". This was not fielded from a Gestalt colleague but a senior facilitator cum coach, one who was insinuating that 'presence' perhaps got in the way and that authenticity was a negative bias in certain settings.

It was not until I wrote the above sentence I was reminded of the following memory, a coaching MSc upon which I ran a 3 day event within a learning group where one participant was hyper-manic, restless, chain-smoking and couldn't sit for more than a few minutes much less listen. He had been let disturb the learning group some time before my arrival. For the first fifteen minutes he spoke on behalf of the group and monopolised attention. I asked if he was OK and what he needed from me and group. I pointed out that others hadn't been heard and wondered if he would allow space for others to interact? He plainly couldn't! He said he'd got what he wanted from me and that he was now content. Eventually he ended up sitting outside the room chain-smoking. He joined us for evening meals – but very drunk, with pressure of thought and speech and commanding the lion's share of attention. He confided he'd given up taking his medication. The course leader who stood silently by through all this, superficially supported what I was doing, although I sensed she was out of her depth and fearful of my rocking the boat. At the end of the event the group shared appreciation that a long-standing problem had at last been faced, reported that they felt freed up to learn and gave very positive feedback. The participant concerned left me a note saying he was going to recommence his medication and later wrote a letter thanking me – but I was never asked back to teach on this programme again. The tutors on this programme were skilled and functioned professionally, but had seemingly missed authenticity from the equation, and without authenticity collusion

flowered. Maybe this is the extra ingredient Gestalt adds? Certainly, it's the part coaches appear to come to me for if this study is to be believed, my Gestalt cultivated 'authentic presence'. Indeed, today a senior coach volunteered that he came to me "because he wanted someone on top of their game; someone whom he couldn't guess where the next question was coming from; someone who was real".

The week before completing this paper, I found myself upon a course in consulting delivered to Gestalt therapists and witnessing a participant – as a client – being infantilised in an exercise by another in the role of coach. The coach chose another to act as her shadow consultant, but the needs of the coach and the shadow consultant and the learning community inadvertently seemed to collide, isolate and leave the client stranded. The more tentative the client's response the more she was labelled as resistive; when she desisted further recourse was made to her 'historical issues'; the more she held back the more she was objectified rather than met – simply she was set up by the field conditions to 'be the problem'. She froze into withdrawal before my eyes. To my mind she was fine and the field was pathological. I am reminded here that coaching or therapy can be infantilising and oppressive though they should never be this way.

What I've begun to suspect from this inquiry is that it is not so much my role as a coach or therapist but the respective field conditions that sculpt the natures of coaching and counselling. Individuals walk in attuned to different realities, presenting different needs and expecting different things. My Gestalt informed approach and presence feed positively into this mix. What we then co-create shapes what results. As the facilitative inquiry and relationship matures my default facilitative profile high in supportive, challenging and catalytic interventions eventually emerges. So what might I do differently? Nothing! But what I continue to do is enhanced through an injection of mindfulness and better appreciation of my 'being'.

In this summary I feel I have arrived at an approximation of the truth; that is 'my truth'. But any model is a mere shadow of the whole, a metaphor created to get at another metaphor.

Another feature of this study was the way 'the field' would configure to provide me with just what I needed when I needed it! The number of coaching clients who spontaneously spoke of their need for therapy, the number of coaches who came anew to my practice, spontaneous comments about coaching and therapy from colleagues, workshops that threw up the issues I was wrestling with in this paper – events too many to list all perfectly timed.

At the close of this study I am left acutely aware of the benefit of coaching and therapy and their suitability to the differing worlds they address. Both coaching and therapy offer valid interventions into differing dimensions of the human condition. Gestalt, with its ability to illuminate awareness and to facilitate phenomenological inquiry into the human condition makes an enormous and valuable contribution in both arenas – by placing inquiry to the fore. Indeed, I believe a Gestalt therapist is best prepared to deliver coaching and to facilitate inquiry into the human condition. Personally, I am clearer as to what I do as a coach and therapist, clearer as to the respective terrain of coaching and therapy and of how I am similar and where I am different in both places. I am more integrated although nothing has changed – apart

from my awareness; before enlightenment chopping wood and carrying water, after enlightenment chopping wood and carrying water (Zen saying).

Knowledge is a superstition supported by culture. As I believe the more we define something the more we lose it, whatever happens I'll endeavour to keep my impressions personal and felt and open-ended. And your job as reader is to compare and contrast my experience with your own – for you must climb beyond my assumptions to liberate your own experiential wisdom.

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