

Group experience of Gestalt technique to gain self-awareness in the community of the Sisters of the Disciple of Jesus in the Eucharist

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Abstract

This research's objective is to enhance Sisters' awareness and encourage their individual growth through "Gestalt Group Program" that is founded on Gestalt Therapy. Besides that, this study also opens minded to all the leaders particular for teachers, counselors, parents etc... to help their students, and participate aware of themselves, aware of their boundaries, to know their need and become mature of their emotion. Eleven Sisters of the Disciple of Jesus in the Eucharist take part in the research. Group survey consisted of six meetings. Each meeting was limited to 120 minutes. The researcher uses the content analysis method and qualitative research methods. To gather data for the research, the researcher created "Personal Information Form" and "Gestalt Group Program Evaluation Form" and worked on each member. To attain qualitative data was assessed via a content analysis method.

Keywords: Gestalt therapy, self-awareness, emotion

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1. Introduction

Gestalt Therapy is one of the existential and humanistic therapy methods and was acquired by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls, his wife, and Paul Goodman. This method focuses on self-awareness. Gestalt Therapy proposes transformation can take place with developing people's awareness. The emphasis in Gestalt Therapy is to increase individual self-awareness and fragmentation to integrity. Gestalt Therapy intends not to analyze individuals, but it targets awareness, integrity and contact with the environment. In sum, Gestalt Therapy is a great coordination of body, mind and soul (Perls, 1948). Gestalt Therapy concentrates on the integration between the whole self and his or her setting. This therapy finds a healthy individual as being someone who has perception in his/her life and lives in the here and now rather than focusing on the past or future and developing personable skills.

Gestalt Therapy is an investigational method that promotes the discovery and living, it is based on experience, and it is a lively method. Gestalt therapists intend to know and realize the individual rather than to move the individual in any path. The gestalt therapy aims further on the nearness of each individual function's moment-to-moment and on what may be happening in each moment between therapist and the individual and less on content (story, history, reinforcement schedules, etc.). In fact, the individual is encouraged to concentrate on becoming more aware of themselves, staying present, and processing things in the here and now (Clarke, 2022).

The most important goals of Gestalt approach are the integration of self-awareness, is a way of individual in contact with his/her senses organs in a specific time with his/her own way of life. Awareness can be a method of training; it's described as the connection between the present and the person's history. Self-awareness is a capability to recognize and appreciate the matters that make you as an individual, including your personality, actions, values, beliefs, emotions, and thoughts. Basically, it is a psychological state in which the self becomes the focus of attention. (Cherry, 2022). In the method of Gestalt, the concept of contact is considered important for psychological health, is a source of life for survival, growth, development, and change. (Latner, 1973, p. 72, O'Leary, 2013). Contact is an unavoidable part of our living, personal change, and maturation. Contact can be described as the person interacting with others without losing their uniqueness. Likewise, Gestalt Therapy embraces the "here and now" attitude. It is essential to focus on the present moment by staying in the present and focusing on the relationships and interactions established by the existing people. It is advised that focusing on here and now improves the effectiveness of therapy groups, and this method will act as an energy source in the group (Perls, 1973; Yalom, 2002, Schultz, 2020).

Gestalt therapy intends to integrate one's awareness to a wholeness of self. The Gestalt method works through self-awareness. Each individual growth in the group is an activity carried out for the support of psychological development of each individual; type of group training including psychological education; a group intends to gain knowledge, development and change in related subjects, meanings and skills. In contrast, Gestalt method sees personal progress groups as groups where individual can increase their awareness, sustenance personal growth, change themselves in certain areas, find opportunities to recognize themselves better and create more practical relationships with themselves and other (Daş, 2009; Yalom, 2002, Auman, 2019). Corresponding to the information, it was considered meaningful to conduct a six-session group in one-week study with the sisters of the Disciple of Jesus in the Eucharist to increase self-awareness based on the Gestalt therapy approach. In this study, it was intended to enhance self-awareness of the sisters and to encourage their personal growth.

2. Method

In this research, it was explored how the levels of sisters' awareness and personal growth of the sisters were involved and affected. Each individual variable of the research is "Gestalt Group Program". The dependent variable is "awareness" levels. The researcher is set up in harmony with the qualitative method. For qualitative methods the analysis of the data was used. In the research, the phenomenological approach, which is one of the fundamentals of Gestalt therapy, is the way a person recognizes and appreciates herself and her environment in a unique way. It highlights the particular significance for an individual rather than the general significance of something (Maher, Robertson, & Howie, 2011; Daş, 2009; Akkoyun, 2001). Therefore, the analysis method is one of the qualitative methods used to show the experiences of the sisters who joined in the group work and the personal meanings they recognized to these practices.

Participants - The participants of this research consist of eleven Sisters of the Disciple of Jesus in the Eucharist, they are novice second years. In the group research, it required voluntary and motivation, it was considered applicable for the sisters to join in the group. For this reason, a permission was asked to the superior and their formator in the community. As a result, their superior and formator accepted. Firstly, the research has an opportunity to talk and overview how the sessions will be done and the purpose of this study for the sisters. Then the sisters were asked to fill up the "Personal Information Form". Afterward, the group was formed, and eleven sisters were joining in the session.

Instruments - In the study, a "Personal Information Form" and "Gestalt Group Program Evaluation Form" was arranged by the researcher, and they were used on group participants. The participants were asked to fill up the "Gestalt Group Program Evaluation Form" which consisted of open-ended questions at the end of the group program. These group program evaluation forms were subjected to content analysis.

Personal Information Form - The Personal Information Form was arranged by the researcher based on the handout of Fr. Arsenio Lumiqued, Jr. MSC., teacher in de la Salle University in Malina. It is a way intended to acquire some significant data or information about the participants and to gain the essential information to involve the participants to be integrated in the research groups. This form contains the information about participants' life and family background, whether they have received help before, whether they have a group experience and so on.

Group Program Evaluation Form - The group participants were requested to answer three open-ended questions arranged by the researcher about the six sessions of group training they participated in the "Gestalt Group Program" application. The main objective of this assessment form is to discover from the participants' point of view how the group practice is and how it affects them. The open-ended questions in the "Group Program Evaluation Form" are as follows.

- What did you gain awareness from the six sessions "Gestalt Group Program" in terms of awareness?
- What kind of changes did you observe in yourself during these six sessions "Gestalt Group Program"?
- How your experience during six sessions "Gestalt Group Program"? described

Group Program Form - Gestalt Group Program is built by six-sessions, the group personal growth program that intends to increase self-awareness through practice and maintain individual growth. The whole purpose of the group program is to increase the level of awareness and interaction of the participants and to assist their personal growth in this way. The group study included exercises, practices, testing and brief of instruction information, sharing and exchanging learning in each session. The length of each meeting was 120 minutes. In the last part of each meeting, the sisters share about their learning and have a short test on their personal growth according to the lesson. The main focus of group work are as follows; emotional awareness, self-image,

discovering personal boundaries, personality learning, value of life, knowing yourself by language of love and healing sessions. The purposes of the group program are; to make each members aware of their needs and desire; cultivating the skills of each individual to stay “here and now”; increasing awareness by making contact and opportunities for each individual; to change each individual ability to identify, to distinguish and to express feelings; to enable each individual increase awareness of the boundaries between themselves and their environment; and to provide awareness about emotional, mental and physical dimensions.

Data Analysis - During the data analysis obtained from the “Group Program Evaluation Form” by analysis method, the data were coded, categorized and topics were made. Gestalt therapy method was used in the purpose of classifications and topics. Since the group program was formed within the scope of the research that is based on the gestalt therapy approach, coding has been presented based on the concepts of “self-awareness”, “relationship with oneself”, “relationship with other” and “boundary”. Classifications were developed by coding the data acquired from the answers of the group participants to the awareness they achieved because of the group program. These classifications are “physical dimension”, “emotional dimension”, “relationship with myself” and “boundaries” and these classifications were identified as “awareness”, “emotion” and “self-awareness” and it is significant.

3. Results

The purpose of the study depending on a result of the “Gestalt Group Program” which was applied to the group participants, it was assessed through qualitative data whether the participants’ fill up answers given in the “Gestalt Group Program Evaluation Form” which was arranged in relation to the possibly goals to be attained were dependable with the results expected from the group sessions. For this reason, the following declaration concerning the three open- ended questions asked to the participants in the group training were examined.

- The Sisters who joined in the group program described an increased self-awareness after six-sessions “Gestalt Group Program” in harmony with the objectives of the group program and it have a clear direction.
- The Sisters who joined in the group program specified the changes they observed in themselves in the six-sessions “Gestalt Group Program” in harmony with the objectives of the group program and it had a clear direction.
- The sisters who joined in the group program described the group work they has experienced in the six-sessions “Gestalt Group Program” in harmony with the objectives of the group program and it have a clear direction.

Table 1

Frequency and percentage on what did you gain awareness on Gestalt Group Program

| Topic | Statements | Scale | | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Self- Awareness | I able to Understand of self-concept. | | 1 9.1% | 5 45.5% | 5 45.5% |
| | I am aware of my Body’s reaction. | | | 4 36.4% | 7 63.6% |
| | I am able to Express my thought. | | | 1 9.1% | 10 90.9% |
| | I am able Expressing my emotion. | | | 1 9.1% | 10 90.9% |
| Total | | | 1 2.3% | 11 25.0% | 32 72.7% |
| Relationship with my self | I am able Aware of my own needs. | | 1 9.1% | 4 36.4% | 6 54.5% |
| | I am able Aware of myself. | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I am able Aware of my talent and capacity. | | 1 | 5 | 5 |

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| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|------|-------|-------|
| | I am able Aware of the Real Value of life. | 9.1% | 45.5% | 45.5% |
| | | | 3 | 8 |
| | | | 27.3% | 72.7% |
| Total | | 2 | 15 | 27 |
| | | 4.5% | 34.1% | 61.4% |
| Relationship with other | I am able Aware on how I contact with other? | | 6 | 5 |
| | | | 54.5% | 45.5% |
| | I am able Aware on how I need contact with environment? | | 8 | 3 |
| | | | 72.7% | 27.3% |
| | I am able Know how to ask for help | | 5 | 6 |
| | | | 45.5% | 54.5% |
| Total | | | 19 | 14 |
| | | | 57% | 42.4% |
| Boundaries | I am able Discover personal bondages. | | 5 | 6 |
| | | | 45.5% | 54.5% |
| | I am able to set up my own boundary. | | 4 | 7 |
| | | | 36.4% | 63.6% |
| Total | | | 9 | 13 |
| | | | 40.9% | 59.1% |

As you can see in Table 1, in the theme of self-awareness the participate have a strong agree in 32 (72.7%), Agree in 11 (25.0%) and only one disagree as 2.3%. In the themes of relationship with myself the participate strongly agree in 27(61.4%), agree 15(27.3%) and disagree 2(4.5%). In the themes of relationship with other the participate have a strong agree in 14 (42.4%) and agree in 19 (57%). In the themes of boundaries, the participate was strongly agree in 13 (59.1%) and agree in 9 (40.9%). With this result the sisters has a positive experience and learning during six sessions in term of self-awareness, relationship with oneself, relationship with other and boundaries. It shows that the group Gestalt program have affected to the sisters of the Disciple of the Holy Eucharist.

Table 2

Frequency and percentage on kind of changes have you observed in yourself in Gestalt Group Program”

| Topic | Statements | Scale | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Physical dimension | I am Stated to aware with my own body/physical. | | | 6 | 5 |
| | | | | 54.5% | 45.5% |
| | I am able Aware of my own senses. | | | 4 | 7 |
| | | | 36.4% | 63.6% | |
| Total | | | 10 | 12 | |
| | | | 45.5% | 54.5% | |
| Emotional dimension | I can express my emotion more clearly. | | | 3 | 8 |
| | | | | 27% | 72.7% |
| | I am Start to focus on my emotion. | | | 6 | 5 |
| | | | | 54.5% | 45.5% |
| | I am able to Know how to distinguish emotion and thought. | | | 4 | 7 |
| | | | 36.4% | 63.6% | |
| Total | | | 13 | 20 | |
| | | | 39.4% | 60.6% | |
| Relationship with my self | I am Started to focus on myself. | | | 2 | 9 |
| | | | | 18.2% | 81.8% |
| | I am able Aware of my need. | | | 2 | 9 |
| | | | | 18.2% | 81.8% |
| | I am Started to recognize myself. | | | 3 | 8 |
| | | | 27.3% | 72.7% | |
| | I am Start to accept and forgive myself. | | 1 | 4 | |
| | | 9.1% | 36.4% | 54.5% | |
| Total | | 1 | 11 | 32 | |
| | | 2.3% | 25.0% | 72.7% | |
| boundaries | I am able Aware of my personal boundaries. | | | 2 | 9 |
| | | | | 18.2% | 81.8% |
| | I am able Start establishing self-limitation. | | | 4 | 7 |
| | | | 36.4% | 63.6% | |
| Total | | | 6 | 16 | |
| | | | 27.3% | 72.7% | |

As can see in the Table 2, the data obtained from themes of physical dimension where the group participate has a strongly agree in 12 (54.5%) and agree in 10 (45.5%). In the themes of emotional dimension, the

participate strongly agree in 20 (60.6%) and agree in 13 (36.4%). In the themes of relationship with myself has a strongly agree 32 (72.7%), agree in 11 (25.0%) and 1 (2.3%) disagree. Then in the themes of boundaries the participate strongly agree in 16 (72.7%) and agree in 6 (27.3%). With this result the sisters has a positive experience and learning during six sessions in term physical dimension, emotional dimension, relationship with myself and boundaries. It shows that the group Gestalt program have affected change of the sisters of the Disciple of the Holy Eucharist.

Table 3

Frequency and percentage on how was the experience of the Gestalt Group Program

| Topic | Statements | Scale | | | |
|----------------------|--|-------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Emotion Definition | I fill very Joyful | | | | 11 100% |
| | I fill very Relaxing | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I fill very Enjoyable | | | | 11 100% |
| | I fill very Exciting | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I fill very Meaningful | | | | 11 100% |
| | I fill very bore, unhelpful and lost time. | 10 90.9% | 1 9.1% | | |
| Total | | 10 90.9% | 1 9.1% | 6 9.1% | 49 74.2% |
| Awareness Definition | I am able to Develop self -awareness | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I am able to Accept life with its better and worse | | | 5 45.5% | 6 54.5% |
| | I am able to be reminded me to love myself | | | 1 9.1% | 10 90.9% |
| | I am able Can express m emotion and thought | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I am able to meet my new person/people | | | 4 36.4% | 7 63.6% |
| Total | | | 16 29.1% | 32 70.9% | |
| Benefit/Significant | I started to improved sense of self-control | | | 6 54.5% | 5 45.5% |
| | I have a better awareness of your needs | | | 3 27.3% | 8 72.7% |
| | I started to Improved communication skills | | | 8 72.7% | 3 27.3% |
| | I started to Improved mindfulness | | | 6 54.5% | 5 45.5% |
| | I started to Increase emotional and understand of myself | | | 2 18.2% | 9 81.8% |
| Total | | | 25 45.5% | 30 54.5% | |

As can you see in table 3, the themes in emotional experience which the participate has strongly agree in 49 (74.2%) and agree in 6 (9.1%), but in negative experience the participate strongly disagree in 10 (90.9%) and only one disagree as 9.1%. in the themes of awareness definition, the participate have a strongly agree in 32 (70.9%) and agree 16 (29.1%). This session was benefic and significant to the participate in 30 (54.5%) as strongly agree and 25 (45.5%) agree with it. With this result the sisters has a positive experience and learning during six sessions in term emotional definition, awareness definition and it significant. It shows that the group Gestalt program have affective growth of the sisters of the Disciple of the Holy Eucharist.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the use of the “Gestalt Group Program” made by the researcher to support the individual growth of the Sisters of the Disciple of Jesus in the Eucharist by increasing self- awareness was explored. The

objective of this study is to explore whether the “Gestalt Group Program” is helpful in improving self-awareness and individual growth of the sisters.

According to the data analysis in the three aspects of the open-ended question has shown that, the sisters are able to aware of themselves, to develop and aware of their emotional, behavioral and boundaries. They were express and described as:

“I was able to reflect and go deeper in myself, I feel very happy, helpful and enjoy with these sessions and I have discovered more about my emotions, thoughts, feelings, values, etc. Those aspects that I was not aware before but now I see myself more. And I hope to develop my self-awareness so that I will grow more”.

“I feel light, hopeful, and joyful after letting go all negative thoughts, feelings, and effects about myself and likewise clothe in me the positive things from what I see in myself, and others see in me. And I was able to open myself to the relationships with the people and come to understand myself and others as well”.

“Through Six's session that I have learned, I am able to look back myself and understand my value of life through family, personal and community life. I am able to express my thought and my emotions to others. I can depend on and treasure it in my formation journey and to live in the harmony way of life through the sharing and teaching that I am able to be learned and captured in the session. Through the sessions I am not only treasure for myself, but I can share with other people not only by word but through my action that how I live it well and how to understand myself and others because we are in different countries, different characters, and languages so that my life will be happy and joyful in my daily of religious family”.

According to the research of Anna Sutton (2016) on “Measuring the Effect of Self-Awareness: Contraction of self-awareness Outcome Questionnaire” stage that “the study contributed to extending our understanding of the self-awareness concept and its effects in everyday life. It identifies the main impacts of self-awareness on people’s day-to-day lives and provides initial evidence of the outcomes associated with the practice of common mindfulness and self-awareness techniques. It can be used in future studies of the comparative effect of these techniques in order to identify ways of improving self-awareness that can enhance reflective self-development, acceptance and proactivity while minimizing related emotional costs”.

Also Asuman Güner Öztürk (2019) on “Gestalt Group Practice for Increasing Awareness of University Students” mentions that “The “gestalt group program” is effective in increasing awareness among university students; supports the personal development of university students; affects the experience of university students joining the group “here and now”; increases the awareness of the participants about their emotional, mental, physical dimensions and their relationship with themselves; affects the participants' awareness of the boundaries they use when making “contact”, affects their awareness of boundary types and their relationships with others.”

Lastly, the qualitative research method used in the study has increased the significance by offering directly data and information from the senses of each individual join in the program. As a results and sister’s sharing has found that the study had a deep impression on increasing awareness levels of the Sisters of the Disciples of the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, in the phenomenological perspective which represents the essential approach of gestalt therapy method, qualitative research method can be used in group practices and similar group procedures affected in this study. Furthermore, the gestalt group program established in the research was proposed and applied in six sessions. The success of group training more than six meetings can be explored to expand awareness levels; awareness of improving the number of the sessions and its role in affecting contact styles can be examined and study further.

This research’s objective is to enhance Sisters’ awareness and encourage their individual growth through

“Gestalt Group Program” that is founded on Gestalt Therapy. Besides that, this study also opens minded to all the leaders particular for teachers, counselors, parents etc... to help their students, and participate aware of themselves, aware of their boundaries, to know their need and become mature of their emotion. To be aware of oneself is to be able recognize our strengths and weaknesses. So that this paper is one of the basic knowledge areas for the teacher, leader, formators and counselors to help their pupils or participate develop and set goals for themselves, to be confident in their ability to improve oneself and discover their inner emotion.

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