THE EFFECT OF GESTALT-BASED GROUP PRACTICE
ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' CONTACT STYLES AND AWARENESS LEVELS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate whether the contact styles and awareness levels of university students enrolled at the Education Faculty increase as a result of the "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" developed by the researchers. In this study, the randomized pretest-posttest control group experiment design was used. Four groups (Experiment I, Control I, Experiment II and Control II) were formed. 48 students took part in the group practices. "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire-Revised" and the "Personal Information Form" were used to obtain data. The data were analyzed by applying the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test. The difference between the pretest-posttest scores of Experiment I and Experiment II groups were found statistically significant. On the other hand, the Control Group I and Control Group II pre-posttest scores were not found statistically significant. As a result, it can be suggested that the Gestalt Personal Development Group Program was an effective program in developing students' awareness and contact styles.

Keywords: Gestalt, Group, Awareness, Contact Styles.

INTRODUCTION

The Gestalt approach is an approach situated under the umbrella of the humanist approaches. It was developed by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls and Poul Goodman in 1940s (Voltan-Acar, 2015). Considering the foundations Gestalt therapy approach is based on, it can be realized that it is shaped by various theories and views, such as the humanist approach, existential approach, phenomenological approach, holistic view, the field theory and the Far East philosophy. Additionally, it bears traces of approaches such as body theory and psychodrama. The Gestalt therapy focuses on the present time and adopts the here-and-now approach. On the other hand, concepts such as awareness, contact, contact styles, personal responsibility are the basic concepts dealt with by the Gestalt practice (Akkoyun, 2001).

According to the Gestalt approach, awareness belongs to "here and now". Awareness defined as the contact among all the sense organs of the individual and all the dimensions of his/her own existence at present is the state of alertness about the individual's own self and his/her environment. It is primarily related to the identification of what is needed and how this need can be met thanks to different sources in the environment. Awareness is an experience form described as the relationship between the current reality and the own existence of the individual (Joyce & Sills, 2001; Latner, 1986; Houston, 2003). This concept also refers to consciousness of all the innate dimensions of existence (i.e., emotional, mental, physical and spiritual), being open to experience in all these dimensions and being able to answer questions such as how I perceive, how I cannot make sense of, how I react and how I abstain from things. Creating awareness about how the individual

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connect or differentiate the self in the flow of life is actually creating awareness about the relationship between the individual's own self and his/her environment. Awareness embodies the ability of getting in contact with other people, responsibility of choice, self-acceptance, insight and knowledge about the environment (Daş, 2009; Voltan-Acar, 2015; Akkoyun, 2001).

Different therapy approaches deal with the concept of awareness. The Gestalt approach regards awareness as the primary aim of the therapy. In addition, the cognitive behavioral therapies enrich themselves by adding the concept of awareness to their theories. Using the east meditation tradition as base, the concept of awareness is explained as an individual's concentration on events occurring at present by accepting others' views and emotions. Moreover, it is considered as a way of directing the attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The increasing interest in the concept of awareness has paved the way for an increase in the importance of "here-and-now" approach. Underlying the basic methodology of the existential approach, the "here-and-now" approach is one of the most common concepts adopted by the humanist-existentialist approaches. Recently, similar to the cognitive behavioral therapy, many therapy approaches have started to add the "here-and-now" approach to their own theories. For instance, the book "Cognitive Humanistic Therapy: Buddhism, Christianity and Being Fully Human" published by Richard Nelson-Jenos in 2004 puts forward a theory combining the humanist and the cognitive approaches.

The other important concepts in the Gestalt approach are contact and contact styles. These concepts explain how individuals get in contacts and how they accommodate to or differentiate from their needs and environment. Contact is seen as the source of life for growth. Also, it is necessary for survival and change (Daş, 2009; Voltan-Acar, 2015) because the individual exists as a part of a specific environment. Nobody can become self-sufficient; instead, the individual exists as a part of the environment. Therefore, it would be fair to state that the behaviors of the individual reflect the environment he/she interacts with (Perls, 1973). According to the Gestalt approach, contact refers to being in touch with the self and the environment without losing his/her own individuality (Latner, 1986). In fact, all the people interact with one another. Still, in the process of contacting (accommodation - differentiation), it is important to have awareness of how contact is maintained. How contact is achieved is related to contact styles. In line with the principles of the Gestalt approach, there are basically six contact styles: retroflection, desensitization, confluence, projection, deflection and introjection. It is necessary to increase the awareness in order to realize the contact styles. Raising awareness about the contact styles is also important because it helps the individual to understand his/her resistances and unfinished businesses. Contact is an unavoidable part of the change and growth (Akkoyun, 2001).

Awareness and contact styles have influence on many aspects of individual's life: growth and maturation, individualization and differentiation, having functional relationships and sustaining these relationships, accepting life as a whole with its positive and negative poles, making choices with free will and taking the responsibility of them, defining the experiences on emotional, physical and mental dimensions, and forming functional boundaries (Daş, 2009; Akkoyun, 2001). It is thought that when the individual improves these dimensions in his/her life, positive changes can be seen in the individual's life and his/her interaction with the others. The method of group work in line with the Gestalt approach is believed to be effective in enhancing these dimensions because the methodology of Gestalt is phenomenological. It paves the way for a positive change by means of direct hands-on experience (Feder & Ronall, 1980; Houston, 2003).

Focusing on the Gestalt practice in relation to concepts of awareness and contact is considered to be the most appropriate approach because of the richness of different approaches it includes and the flexibility of its methodology. To increase awareness and contact, the Gestalt approach gives the individual the opportunity to have hands-on experience with the identified theme and thus enables growth and change through this experience. It deals more with all the mental-emotional-physical dimensions rather than with learning on the level of cognition (Perls, 1973; Feder & Ronall, 1980). Therefore, it can be thought as an effective method as a short-term group work. It is realized that this view is supported by a study carried out by Çağla Gülol (2005) pertaining to the Gestalt approach. In her study entitled "A structured personal-development gestalt contact styles group program and its effectiveness", the "Gestalt Contact Styles Group Practice Program" was developed and found to be effective for the use of contact styles more effectively and for the positive change of the self-schema. The result of the study is that the Gestalt approach encouraging direct hands-on experience

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in terms of awareness and contact contributes to the personal development of university students when it is applied as a personal development group program raises their awareness levels and leads change in their contact styles.

Gestalt counseling justifies individuals' psychologically functional state, their development of satisfying relationships, meeting their own needs and being able to support themselves by referring to the level of awareness. Thus, it would be fair to point out that if the individual's level of awareness is high, he/she is psychologically functional, aware of his/her emotions and thoughts, effective in organizing his/herself and his/her environment, and thus is functional (Perls, 1973; Latner, 1986; Daş, 2009). For that reason, it is argued that carrying out a group practice involving individuals in the period of young adulthood to increase their contact and awareness will be beneficial for them in the adulthood period. In Handlon & Fredericson's (1998) paper focusing on what changes the people, it is claimed that the group interaction and positive-negative feedback causes internal awareness (e.g., sensation and emotions), raises awareness about many choices and alternatives in life and provides individuals with the skill to compete with the challenges of life. From this point of view, it can be argued that implementing a "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" is a useful method to raise university students' styles of contact with themselves and their environment and their levels of awareness. In this regard, selecting university students studying at the education faculty as the participants is very important because when teachers, guidance teachers and psychological counselors develop in terms of contact styles and awareness, their competence, personal efficiency and their ways of seeing relationships also enhance. Considering that students take their teachers as examples, a ripple effect can be felt for the coming generations who will also have awareness. It can also be argued that in addition to the academic development of students enrolled at the education faculty, their personal development should be supported. By this means, candidate teachers, guidance teachers and psychological counselors' levels of awareness can be increased and the functionality of their styles of contact with themselves and with the others increases.

This study investigates whether the contact styles and awareness levels of university students attending the education faculty increase as a result of the group counseling program prepared by the researchers. The main aim of the present study is to explore the effectiveness of the Gestalt personal development program in increasing university students' awareness levels and enhancing their contact styles.
In line with the purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale in favor of the posttest assessment?
2. Is there a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale in favor of the posttest assessment?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale in favor of the posttest assessment?
4. Is there a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale in favor of the posttest assessment?

METHOD

In this part of the study, information regarding the research design, participants, data collection instruments, Gestalt Personal Development Group Program, data collection procedures and the analysis of the data is presented, respectively.

Research Design
In this study, the randomized pretest-posttest control group experiment design was used. The research design is based on the comparison of scores of control and experiment groups in the pretests and posttests. The data was analyzed quantitatively. Because the control and experiment groups of participants were organized randomly through announcements made to students in the Psychological Counseling and Guidance department

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and education faculty students in other departments, the research design of the study can be named as randomly selected pretest-posttest design with control group. The symbols used to explain the research design are below:

Experiment Group I	Pretest (T1)	Gestalt Group Program	Posttest (T3)
Control Group I	Pretest (T2)	---	Posttest (T4)
Experiment Group II	Pretest (T5)	Gestalt Group Program	Posttest (T7)
Control Group II	Pretest (T6)	---	Posttest (T8)

Figure 1. Research Design

Participants

The participants taking part in the study were students in the education faculty of a private university in Istanbul in the academic year 2014-2015. Four groups were formed: Experiment Group I, Control Group I, Experiment Group II and Control Group II. University students in the Experiment Group I and the Control Group I were enrolled at the psychological counseling and guidance department. Students in Experiment Group II and the Control Group II were studying at different departments of the education faculty.

As volunteering is essential and motivation is a must in group practice, students were given the opportunity to apply to take part in the study in the process of selecting the participants. Therefore, announcements related to the group practice were made for the students in the education faculty. Students who applied to participate in the study were sent a description form via e-mail to provide them with information pertaining to the group practice. A pool including students who applied for the group practice was created. These students were divided in three groups and were invited for an introductory meeting. A total of 65 students applied to take part in the group practice. In these introductory meetings, students who were given information about the group practice were distributed the scales as a means of administering the pre-tests. The initial lists of the Control and Experiment groups were formed in accordance with the scores they obtained from these scales administered as pretests. Preliminary interviews were conducted individually with each student who expressed their willingness to take part in the group practice. The lists of participants for each group were finalized as a result of these interviews.

As for the groups, 24 students at the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department were selected for the Experiment Group I (N=12) and the Control Group I (N=12). 24 students studying at different departments of the education faculty took part in the Experiment Group II (N=12) and the Control Group II (N=12). Nine of the students studying at departments other than the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department were enrolled at Mathematics, eight were studying in the English language teaching and eight were students in the Turkish language teaching departments. The total number of participants taking part in the group practice was 48. In the process of arranging the Control and Experiment groups, the statistical analysis of students' pretest scores was taken into account and attention was paid to the fact that there should not be significant differences between the groups. Students in the Experiment Groups I and II were asked to sign a "group participation agreement" before the group practice was implemented and they were given information about the rules and the general principles of the group practice. Additionally, 17 students who could not be involved in the group practice were contacted to invite them to a two-hour session (pilot study) for a group practice on a specified date.

Gestalt Personal Development Group Program

The Gestalt Personal Development Group Program was prepared by the researchers. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, an eight-week group practice was implemented in the Experiment groups to raise their awareness and to enhance their contact styles. This life-based personal development program aimed to increase participants' awareness by means of hands-on experience. The titles and aims of the sessions organized for the group practice are as follows:

1. Introduction and Forming the Ground: Forming a Basis for the group practice
2. Here and Now: Focusing attention on now, shifting attention and focusing on the body
3. Emotional Awareness: Recognizing, realizing and expressing feelings

4. Contact Boundary: Creating solid, permeable and semi permeable boundaries
5. Trust: Feeling of trust, social skills and the self-esteem
6. Awareness: The automatic behaviors and actions performed unconsciously and hastiness
7. Assimilation and Termination: Internalizing the experiences, revealing the awareness and closing

Data Collection Instruments
In this research study, two different quantitative data collection tools were used. To assess participants' levels of awareness, the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" was utilized while their contact styles were assessed through the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire-Revised". Both of these scales were administered one week before the group practice started and one week after the practice ended. Also, students filled out a "Personal Information Form" developed by the researchers.

Having been developed by Kepner (1982), the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" was revised in 1986 and renamed as "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire-Revised" (GCSQ-R). The adaptation of this scale into Turkish was done by Canan Gökdemir Aktaş (2002). Including a total of 61 items, the GCSQ-R is comprised of five sub-dimensions: "retroflection", "deflection", "contact", "confluence" and "desensitization". Projection and introjections, which were two of the sub-dimensions in the original scale, were included under the sub-dimension of confluence as a result of the adaptation study. The high scores obtained from the scale (except for the "contact" contact style) indicate that the contact styles are not used functionally. The scoring rubric of the scale is in the form of a 5-likert-type ranking.

On the other hand, Brown & Ryan (2003) developed the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" (MAAS), and the scale was adapted into Turkish in the university context of Turkey (Özyeşil, Arslan, Kesici & Deniz, 2011). Aiming to assess the awareness of the instant experiences in daily life and the tendency to be careful about such experiences, the MAAS is a scale with 15 items and a one-factor structure. The total item-total correlation changes from .436 to .682. The coefficient of internal consistency is .80. The scale is a six-point Likert-type scale. The degrees in the scale are as follows: always, unusually, sometimes, rarely, hardly ever, never". The highest score to obtain from the scale is 90 while the lowest score is 15. The high scores in the scale indicate that the awareness is also high.

Data Collection Procedure
An eight-week psychological counseling group practice was applied once a week (each session took 120 minutes) in the experiment groups to increase participants' awareness and to improve their contact styles. No group practice was applied in the control group which was not exposed to any treatments during the eight-week period. 12 participants, 3 of whom were male and 9 of whom were female took part in the sessions offered to the Experiment Group I while 12 female participants attended the session in the Experiment Group II. No participants withdrew from the group practice and the Experiment groups completed the practices with the same number of students. The pre-tests were administered to control and experiment groups one week before the group practice started while the post-tests were conducted one week after the practice was completed.

Data Collection and Analysis
To implement the group practice in the education faculty of a private university in Istanbul, the dean of the faculty was consulted with and a petition was written for permission. The permission was given to the researchers to implement the group practice in the lab which belonged to the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department of the university. After obtaining necessary permission and organizing the practice groups, the researchers collected data from March to May in the 2014-2015 academic year.

All the scales were administered to the university students by the researchers. After the purpose of the study was explained, it was underlined that the personal information of the participants would not be shared with third parties and the privacy policy would be adhered to. Necessary contact information of the students who applied to take part in the group practice was also collected in order to be able to reach them later. Students who expressed willingness to take part in the study were gathered in three groups in the Psychological Counseling and Guidance lab for the pretest scale administration. Sufficient time was allocated for the

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completion of the scales in accordance with the time required by the participants. The same scales were administered again as posttests to the students when the group practice was completed. 24 students in the Control Group I and II were given the posttest in a specified date. On the other hand, the posttests were administered to the Experiment Group I and II meeting on the usual group practice date one week after the eight-week group practice was completed. When the data collection procedure was completed, the scales were scored. All the data obtained during the study was coded and analyzed using a statistical analysis program as well as the excel program.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed as a result of the statistical analysis of the data relevant to each research question were presented below. The pretest scale analysis showed no statistically significant difference between the practice groups. Thus, one can state that the Experiment Group I and the Control Group I as well as the Experiment Group II and the Control Group II were statistically similar considering the pretest scale scores.

The first research question of the study deals with whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest score averages of the Experiment Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale (i.e., retroflection, deflection, contact, confluence, desensitization) in favor of the posttest assessment. To answer this question, the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test was applied. The findings are presented below on Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Awareness	Negative Ranks	1	3.00	3.00	-2.825	.005
	Positive Ranks	11	6.82	75.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				

As can be understood from Table 1, the analysis of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test applied to identify whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean ranks (z=-2.825, p <.05). At the end of the group practice implemented in the Experiment Group I, the awareness levels of the participants in the group positively changed and increased.

Table 2. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group I in the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Contact Styles	Negative Ranks	12	6.50	78.00	-3.059	.002
	Positive Ranks	0	.00	.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				

As can be realized in Table 2, the results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test used to find out whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group I in the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" indicated that the difference in the mean ranks was statistically

significant (z=-3.059, p <.05). The group practice provided to the Experiment Group I led to a positive change and development in the contact styles of the participants in this group.

Table 3. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group I in the Sub-Dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Retroflection	Negative Ranks	11	6.00	66.00	-2.940	.003
	Positive Ranks	0	.00	.00		
	Equal	1				
	Total	12				
Deflection	Negative Ranks	10	7.05	70.50	-2.476	.013
	Positive Ranks	2	3.75	7.50		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				
Contact	Negative Ranks	2	4.75	9.50	-2.328	.020
	Positive Ranks	10	6.85	68.50		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				
Confluence	Negative Ranks	10	7.00	70.00	-2.440	.015
	Positive Ranks	2	4.00	8.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				
Desensitization	Negative Ranks	3	6.00	18.00	-.984	.325
	Positive Ranks	7	5.29	37.00		
	Equal	2				
	Total	12				

As illustrated in Table 3, the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test applied to identify whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group I in the sub-dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" showed that the difference in the mean ranks was significant in the following sub-dimensions: "Retroflection" (z=-2.940, p <.05), "Deflection" (z=-2.476, p <.05), "Confluence" (z=-2.440, p <.05) and "Contact" (z=-2.328, p <.05). Conversely, the difference in the "desensitization" sub-dimension was not statistically significant (z=.984, p >.05). This finding means that positive changes occurred in the participants' retroflection, deflection, confluence and contact sub-dimensions while no significant difference was found as for the desensitization sub-dimension.

The second research question focused on whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest score averages of the Control Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale (i.e., retroflection, deflection, contact, confluence, desensitization) in favor of the posttest assessment. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test used to identify whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group I in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" revealed statistically insignificant difference in the mean ranks (z=-1.071,

p >.05). The results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test applied to answer the question whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group I in the sub-dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" indicated that the difference in the mean ranks was not statistically significant (z=-.157, p >.05). The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks test used to find out whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group I in the sub-dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" revealed no statistically significant difference in the mean ranks in the following sub-dimensions: "Retroflection" (z=-.708, p >.05), "Deflection" (z=-1.209, p >.05), "Confluence" (z=-.805, p >.05), "Desensitization" (z=-.493, p >.05) and "Contact" (z=-1.886, p >.05). That there was no difference in the scores of the control group which was not given any treatments during the study was an expected result.

The third research question of the study deals with whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest score averages of the Experiment Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale (i.e., retroflection, deflection, contact, confluence, desensitization) in favor of the posttest assessment. Thus, non-parametric Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test was applied. The results are illustrated below on Tables 4, 5, and 6.

Table 4. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Awareness	Negative Ranks	0	.00	.00	-3.065	.002
	Positive Ranks	12	6.50	78.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				

As presented in Table 4, the results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test used to reveal whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" indicated that the difference in the mean ranks were statistically significant (z=-3.065, p <.05). The group practice applied in Experiment Group II gave rise to positive developments in the group member's levels of awareness.

Table 5. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group II in the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Contact Styles	Negative Ranks	11	7.00	77.00	-2.981	.003
	Positive Ranks	1	1.00	1.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				

As can be understood from Table 5, the result of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test used to understand whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group II in the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" showed statistically significant differences in the mean ranks (z=-2.981, p <.05). Positive changes and developments were found as a result of the group practice applied in the Experiment Group II.

Table 6. Results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test Applied to Identify whether There is a Significant Difference between the Pre-Posttest Scores of the Experiment Group II in the Sub-Dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire"

Score	Ranks	N	S.O.	S.T.	z	P
Retroflection	Negative Ranks	9	6.44	58.00		
	Positive				-2.228	.026
	Ranks	2	4.00	8.00		
	Equal	1				
	Total	12				
Deflection	Negative Ranks	10	7.10	71.00		
	Positive				-2.518	.012
	Ranks	2	3.50	7.00		
	Equal	0				
	Total	12				
Contact	Negative Ranks	3	2.67	8.00		
	Positive				-2.239	.025
	Ranks	8	7.25	58.00		
	Equal	1				
	Total	12				
Confluence Ranks	Negative Ranks	10	6.10	61.00		
	Positive				-2.504	.012
	1	5.00	5.00			
	Equal	1				
	Total	12				
Desensitization	Negative Ranks	6	6.25	37.50		
	Positive				-.401	.688
	Ranks	5	5.70	28.50		
	Equal	1				
	Total	12				

As illustrated in Table 6, the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks test applied to find out whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Experiment Group II in the sub-dimension of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" revealed statistically significant differences in the mean ranks of the "Retroflection" (z=-2.228, p <.05), "Deflection" (z=-2.518, p <.05), "Confluence" (z=-2.504, p <.05) and "Contact" (z=-2.239, p <.05) sub-dimensions. On the other hand, the difference was not found to be statistically significant in terms of the "desensitization" sub-dimension (z=-.401, p >.05). This finding means that there were changes in the retroflection, deflection, confluence and contact sub-dimensions of the group members while no significant changes were revealed as far as the desensitization was concerned.

The fourth research question of the study was whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest score averages of the Control Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale", "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" and the sub-dimensions of the scale (i.e., retroflection, deflection, contact, confluence, desensitization) in favor of the posttest assessment. The result of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test used to answer the question whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group II in the "Mindful Attention Awareness Scale" showed no statistically significant differences (z=-1.630, p >.05). According to the results of the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test applied to identify whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group II in the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire", there was no statistically significant difference in the mean ranks (z=-.153, p >.05). The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Test applied to reveal whether there is a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group II in the sub-dimensions of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" showed no statistically significant difference in the mean ranks in the following

sub-dimensions: "Retroflection" (z=-.578, p >.05), "Deflection" (z=-.512, p >.05), "Confluence" (z=-.462, p >.05) and "Contact" (z=-.617, p >.05). Conversely, the difference in the "desensitization" sub-dimension was found to be statistically significant (z=-2.232, p <.05). The fact that there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of the Control Group II in the sub-dimensions of the "Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire" (retroflection, deflection, confluence and contact) was an expected result as no treatments were given to this group.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated whether the "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" is effective in increasing university students' levels of awareness and enhancing their contact styles and yielded the finding that the group practice applied in this study was generally effective in developing the awareness and contact styles of students in the experiment groups. First, the study explored whether the control and the Experiment groups were equal with regards to the awareness levels assessed through the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale and their contact styles were assessed by means of the Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire. The analysis of the pretest scores revealed that the groups were similar in terms of these variables.

Regarding the first research question of the study, it can be pointed out that considering the results of the pre-posttest analysis of Experiment Group I, the group practice was effective in improving participants' contact styles and awareness levels (Tables 1, 2, 3). The increase in the participants' scores of the awareness scale and the decrease in their scores in the contact styles scale were expected outcomes in line with the aims of the present study. As for the sub-dimensions of the Gestalt Contact Styles Questionnaire, as a result of the group practice, positive changes were found regarding the contact styles such as retroflection, deflection and confluence. The increase in the contact styles scores and the decrease in the retroflection, deflection and confluence scores are regarded as positive changes from the perspective of the functional use of contact styles. It is thought that the reason behind the significant difference in the obtained data is that the participants of the Experiment Group I were students at the department of "psychological counseling and guidance". The second research question of the study was related to the question whether there is a significant difference in the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group I. Analysis relevant to this question indicated that there is not a significant difference in the awareness and contact styles of students in the Control Group I. The fact that there is not a significant difference in the scores of the students in the Control Group I as a result of the eight-week "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" offered to the Experiment Group I was an expected outcome of the present study.

As for the third research question, the results of the pre-posttest scores of university students in the Experiment Group II (i.e., students at departments other than the psychological counseling and guidance department) indicated that there was an increase in the awareness scores of the Experiment Group II and a decrease in their scores of contact styles (Tables 5, 6, 7). It was also found that the Group practice led to a significant difference in the scale scores of the participants in the Experiment Group II. The increase in their awareness scores and the decrease in their contact styles scores were expected outcomes in this study. Taking the sub-dimensions of the contact styles into consideration, the results revealed a positive score increase in the retroflection, deflection and confluence contact styles while a negative score increase was found in terms of the "contact" contact styles. As a result of the analysis carried out to uncover whether there was a significant difference between the pre-posttest scores of the Control Group II, it was realized that there was no difference related to the scores of Control Group II. That there was no difference in the scores of the Control Group II which was not given any treatments in the process of the eight-week implementation of the "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" in the Experiment Group II was another expected outcome of the present study.

The "Gestalt Personal Development Program" was prepared in line with the following principles: focusing on the present time, focusing attention on a specific area, being able to remain here and now, having awareness of their needs and the environment, providing motivation related to building contacts (relationships), raising awareness about contact styles (establishing relationships), developing social skills and providing a positive self-image; awareness-raising about emotion, thought and the body, developing awareness about the boundary between his/herself and the environment, experiencing different forms of boundary, raising

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awareness about the automatic inadvertent acts, protecting individuality, differentiating from the others and developing the self to take reasonability. Considering the analyzed data, it can be asserted that the "Gestalt Personal Development Program" offered to the Experiment group achieved its goals. The results indicate that Gestalt-based group practice is effective as for the development of the areas mentioned above. It is also noteworthy that in addition to the academic success and/or skills of candidate teachers in the education faculty and prospective psychological counselors, they improved themselves in the aforementioned areas.

It would be true to state that the findings of the present study are compatible with studies pertaining to the Gestalt approach and the concept of awareness carried out in Turkey. For instance, in Gülol's (2005) study entitled "A structured personal-development-centered gestalt contact styles group therapy program and its effectiveness", the "Gestalt Contact Styles Group Therapy Program" developed by the researcher was found to be effective in the use of contact styles more effectively and in the positive change of the identity schema. In another study entitled "The Effects Of Mindfulness Based Therapy Program On Depressive Symptoms Of Individuals", Demir (2014) found that the eight-session mindfulness-based group practice significantly reduced participants' scores of depression and stress, and it was also asserted that this decrease continued even after the permanence assessments were applied. Similarly, Korkut (1991) concluded that the individual counseling based on the Gestalt approach was an effective method as far as issues causing continues anxiety and focus of control are concerned. Finally, in another study carried out by Özhan (2001), the findings indicated that the individual counseling based on the Gestalt approach was effective to decrease the continuous anxiety levels and increasing social adaptation levels.

Additionally, to illustrate the effectiveness of the Gestalt-based group practice, Stein's (1984) study entitled "Gestalt Awareness Training" aiming to raise awareness and decrease the level of anxiety yielded the finding that the participants' awareness levels increased while their levels of anxiety decreased. Moreover, McGrath (1989) carried out a four-week Gestalt awareness group practice (three hours a week) aiming to raise participants' self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy and came to the conclusion that the awareness group practice had a positive influence on self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy. Similarly, as a result of the five-week experiential Gestalt group counseling implemented by Adesso, Euse, Hanson, Hendry, & Choca (1974) aiming to develop their participants' personal development, it was found that the counseling practice was effective in terms of "positive self-reference". Finally, in Anderson's (2014) recent study involving a 12-week psycho-educational Gestalt-based practice for parents with children in the adolescence period to raise their mindfulness and their interpersonal communication skills, it was found that the group practice was effective in increasing mindfulness and interpersonal communication skills.

When the studies dealing with Gestalt contact styles are examined, it can be realized that studies focusing on contact styles that are related to the functionality of the relationship between the individual and the environment and psychological well-being specifically investigated the relationship between contact styles and concepts such as attachment styles, coping styles, anxiety and anger levels, self-image, interpersonal schemas, psychological symptoms, defense mechanisms, coping styles with stress, life satisfaction, trauma and burn-out. It would be fair to state that the findings in this study corroborate with other studies pertaining to contact styles (Akça, Şahin, Vazgeçer, 2011; Bozkurt, 2006; Balkaya, 2006; Gürdil, 2014; Gürsoy, 2009; Aktaş, 2002; Kuyumcu, 2005) in that the use of proper contact styles is important in terms of the relationship between the individual and his/her environment.

In conclusion, it was found in this study that the "Gestalt Personal Development Group Program" had a positive effect on increasing university students' level of awareness and on enhancing their contact styles; also, the results obtained from the Experiment group varied significantly when compared to the results collected from the control group. Besides, when the Experiment Group I was compared to the Experiment group II, the results were found to be close to each other. Although it was expected that the Experiment Group I would have better scores than the Experiment Group II, the similarity of results for both groups could be justified because the students in the Experiment Group II had taken formation courses and psychology courses as elective courses.

In the light of these findings, the following recommendations can be made for further research: follow-up studies can be carried out to reveal the permanent effects of such studies, the group practice applied in this

study in line with the Gestalt approach can be applied for other students in different undergraduate programs and qualitative research methods can also be used from a phenomenological perspective.

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