Gestalt Review 14

Gestalt Parent Coaching©:
A New Model for Intervening
In Family Systems

H A R V E Y   M E L N I C K ,   M S ,   G C C ,   P C C

A B S T R A C T

Gestalt Parent Coaching (GPC)© is a new application of the Gestalt coaching model (Simon, 2009, 2012) that specifically focuses on working with families. In the GPC Model, parents are the primary clients of the coach and are encouraged and supported in becoming change agents on behalf of their children. The adults learn safely to explore, practice, and acquire new and more effective ways of behaving as parents. This article presents the GPC model, traces its roots in Gestalt theory, compares and contrasts it with organizational coaching, and gives concrete examples of Gestalt principles in the practice of GPC.

Introduction

Coaching, and more specifically Gestalt approaches to coaching, have gained in popularity over the past ten years as practical avenues for supporting individual change within organizations. This popularity has been reflected in

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the increased number of recent coaching-related articles (e.g., Simon, 2009, 2012; Kaplan, 2011; Magerman and Martin, Eds., 2012) and training programs.[1] Its success is also apparent in the noteworthy acceptance it has achieved in corporate circles. Yet to this author's knowledge, this is the first article that attempts to extend coaching to working specifically with families.

The goal here is to discuss how Gestalt principles and processes are applied to working with families in ways that differ from therapy and organizational coaching. First, GPC will be compared and contrasted with organizational coaching. Then the importance of an optimistic, strength- and skill-based approach to working with families will be highlighted. Selected Gestalt concepts that form the basis of this model, starting with the "Cycle of Experience" as applied to coaching families, will be reviewed (see Appendix A). This process involves building trust, increasing awareness, mobilizing, acting, integrating, and assimilating new parenting experiences.[2] Finally, the concepts of unfinished business and hierarchy and power will be discussed, as well as the use of natural environmental supports.

Non-Gestalt Roots of the Gestalt Parent Coaching Model

GPC theory and practice does not rest solely on Gestalt theory but draws on the ideas of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1938) and the pioneering work of Gregory Bateson (1972). Behavioral techniques for shaping behavior are based in behavioral psychology (Skinner, 1934; Bandura, 1977). These later theorists provide parents with proactive, strategic methods that have been proven effective in reshaping behavior over time. GPC's inherent strengths-based perspective is also consistent with and reflects the approaches of Positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

GPC draws upon varied family systems theory and research orientations. The work of the following theorists significantly contributed to the GPC philosophy of service delivery and strategic methods: Bowen (1993), Satir (1983), and Zinker (1977, 1994). Other family- centered models and strategies include those of the founders of the Philadelphia Child Guidance Center (Minuchin, 1974; Haley, 1991); and the early research of the Palo Alto Group (Watzlawick, Bevins-Bevalas, and Jackson, 1974; Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1967).

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[1]Similar visibility of coaching's emerging relevance can be found in training and certification programs offered by the International Federation of Coaching (IFC), the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, and the Gestalt International Study Center's Competency Development Program for Coach Certification, Skills for High Impact Coaching (CDPCC).

[2]Many Gestalt theorists include contact as a phase that occurs between action and integration/assimilation. This version of the model views contact as occurring throughout the cycle; the form of contact is greatly influenced by where it appears on the cycle.

GPC and Organizational Coaching:
Similarities and Differences

Not surprisingly, there are many similarities between a Gestalt approach to coaching families[3] and coaching in organizations. Both family work and organizational coaching acknowledge the importance of cocreation and appreciate how content and process are developed and managed. Both must appreciate that there are no bystanders. Everyone and everything influences the coaching situation. In both, coaches serve as change agents for parents within their families and for employees within their organizations. For the coaching to be successful, coach and client(s) need to agree on the process. And both applications require building trust, engaging the client, establishing responsibilities, identifying goals, and supporting strategies that bring about change (see Appendix B for Supporting Theories of Change).

There are also significant differences between the Gestalt approach to coaching families and coaching in organizations. First, while organizational coaching typically works with individuals, the GPC coach generally works with parenting dyads.[4]In addition, most organizational coaches have a supervisor with whom the coach has to develop a relationship and determine responsibilities. In families, the parents are both "the bosses and the clients." In fact, much of the work supports the parents to embrace their leadership roles and be more effective coaches to their children. There are also obvious financial differences. The cost of parent coaching is borne fully by the parents; in organizational coaching, the company absorbs the cost of coaching. Other than through divorce, family hierarchies are not open to structural "solutions" typically available in organizations (e.g., firing, demotion, job redesign or reassignment, mentoring an under-performing individual). In organizations, there are strong external incentives for the individuals to participate (e.g., continued employment and other financial incentives). In contrast, a parent's internal motivation to participate is fueled by love and primary responsibility for the family. And due to legal, financial, childcare realities, etc. associated with the arc of raising children, the parental relationship, even after divorce or separation, continues for many years (some say, forever), whereas the employee/employer relationship is more defined and time-bound.

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[3]Similar to other coaching approaches, GPC is not intended to supersede the need for psychotherapeutic work with individuals who exhibit serious emotional and/or psychological behaviors or thought disorders.

[4]This article focuses primarily on two-parent families, even though there are many different combinations of families; no one definition encompasses them all.

GPC: Optimistic, Strengths- and Skills-Based

GPC coaches build upon existing competencies. Rather than focusing on what is "wrong" within the family, the GPC coach seeks to discard the parents' current, and sometimes ineffective, parenting strategies and to build more effective behaviors from the ground up. GPC does so by first assisting parents in identifying their existing competencies, insofar as they are often unaware of these behaviors, or under-appreciate or minimally use them.[5] Here is a case example:

> *Parents of two children ages 14 and 18 sought out GPC, after many years of individual and family therapy based upon diagnosed anxiety disorders in the husband and the children. In our initial conversation, both parents shared with me that they could be tough "bastards" if they needed to be. They focused their parenting efforts on enforcing strict homework standards, engaging in constant communication with their children's teachers, and having their children participate in sports as exercises in character building. Yet, they failed to value properly their daughter's extraordinary musical abilities (she had perfect pitch, for example), and their son's nearly flawless academic achievements. They only paid attention to what did not qualify (in their own minds) as movement toward an "achievable goal." In time, they realized that this highly critical, "tough love" approach had risen to unacceptable, self-defeating levels. Though well-intentioned, they had been unaware of how this perspective was affecting their children, and their relationship with their children and with each other. The pressure, sadness, and anxiety their approach was imposing on their family were not evident to them; all they could see were their good intentions.*
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> **Intervention:** *Utilizing a strengths-based perspective, we first focused on their ability and willingness to communicate, their commitment to their children, and the energy they devoted to their children's well-being and future. We consistently heightened "what was working" and emphasized their children's accomplishments rather than their perceived deficits. The parents learned that their ability to communicate could be refocused and result in a more positive parenting approach. Consequently, they became more verbal in praising their children and less critical of their children's academic accomplishments. Weekly experiments and debriefings allowed them*

[5]This approach and focus on highlighting and expanding current capabilities is similar to that of Positive Psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and is often described as "strengths-based."

to try out new ways of interacting with their children; in time they were able to embrace and integrate these ways into their parenting skill set.

Often when parents seek out coaching, they are at the "end of their rope," having tried more traditional approaches such as individual, couple, and family psychotherapy, self-help books, medications—all of which have proved ineffective in the long run. Given their power to impact the family positively, why are so many parents unable to utilize these approaches to create and sustain an affirming parent family unit? Simply stated, most therapeutic approaches do not focus on skills development, and those that do are often poorly taught. Further, some approaches pay inadequate attention to the effects of a parent's childhood experiences, which often influence parenting values and styles in an unaware way with little or no questioning or self-reflection. In parenting, love and goal-setting are not enough without also having a set of guiding skills. These include:

- becoming aware of the strengths of one's parenting style,
- embracing one's own parenting style and values,
- advocating in the best interests of one's children,
- taking responsibility for the influence one has on children's behavior,
- establishing stable, consistent, and predictable parenting methods,
- establishing systemic and enduring changes by focusing on the behaviors of each family member within the family context.

In addition to developing skills, successful parents must adjust their parenting methods over time to accommodate shifts in developmental and situational needs of their marriage, their children, and their family. They must also adjust to unpredictable, external stressors over which they have little or no control; they need to have the capacity to modify how they parent in order to address unexpected occurrences such as changing economic factors, marital difficulties, or child-related problems (e.g., diagnosed medical, psychological, emotional, behavioral, or learning-related challenges).

Gestalt Cycle of Experience and Coaching

Building Trust

Establishing a trusting, working relationship with each parent—one that engages them—is critical to the GPC process. Since parents arrive with a sense of urgency and an array of expectations (often experienced as a mixture of optimism and skepticism), their hopes must be addressed quickly in order for trust to develop. Unfortunately, parenting partners often enter into coaching holding different priorities, goals, and expectations in regard to their wants and needs and those of their children. For example, one parent may see

areas of noncompliance as the most important to address, while the other parent may be more concerned about academic under-performance or the unhappiness of all family members. To create and maintain trust, coaches must walk a tightrope by balancing the need to meet clients' expectations, while not generating unrealistic hope for "quick fixes" that will rarely endure.

Identifying and addressing chronic and habitual behavior in the parents, the children, and the family is crucial for trust building. Habits and well-developed parenting patterns are quite difficult to change, no matter what the method. Trust is increased when the coach is able to affirm that parents are doing "the best that they can," and to validate well-intentioned, though often unsuccessful, attempts to deal with their issues and concerns. The coach helps the parents to establish a meaningful sense of acceptance and appreciation for their previous efforts, and to value small gains. Here is a case example:

> *A husband and wife who were having difficulty parenting their 11-year old daughter entered into coaching after interviewing me on two separate occasions. This was his first and her second marriage. She was critical of her husband's parenting efforts, feeling that his contribution at home was "underwhelming." Her style was scattered, challenging, and active; his was analytical, calm, and passive. He was also emotionally distant and conflict averse. They were both initially vocal and effusive in their praise of the coaching process, but after the first three sessions the wife called and asked for a "hiatus."*
>
> **On Building Trust:** *In hindsight, it became apparent to the coach that their initial trust was superficial. It had developed too quickly, was shallow, and never had the opportunity to evolve into something more.*

Increasing Awareness

More often, families come to coaching with a heightened awareness of what they are doing wrong. GPC coaches commit to supporting an optimistic stance (Melnick and Nevis, 2005) that focuses on increasing awareness of competence. The GPC coach helps the parents become aware of existing abilities and skills that increase possibilities for meaningful change. Here is a case example:

> *A cardiologist who works long hours has three children under the age of eight, and a husband who also worked long hours. They employ both a day and evening nanny. Upon entering coaching, this woman's awareness was focused on what she was not doing well, resulting in a negative self-image with respect to her role as a mother. She shared how guilty her work and home situation made her feel*

because she was often gone before her children woke up, and she frequently came home either when they were about to go to sleep or had already been put to bed. She also revealed that the way she raised her children contrasted sharply with how she had been raised by her cardiologist father and university professor mother. In fact, her mother took a hiatus from her academic career in order to be a stay-at-home mother, which exacerbated my client's sense of failure as a parent. Thus, she entered coaching feeling inadequate as a mother.

Intervention: *Coaching focused on the mother's accepting the work situation and becoming less self-critical. She became aware that she had neither time nor energy to devote to her children on a daily basis. Coaching supported her realizing that no matter what, she was always doing the best she could, and that her contribution to her children and family could not simply be quantified by the amount of time she had available to spend with them.*

The GPC coach helps parents become aware not only of their own individual patterns but also of interactional patterns between family members. The coach heightens awareness of these family relationships and incorporates this knowledge into coaching sessions. Here is a case example:

A couple I worked with for over a year became aware of the impact the husband had on his wife and children most evenings when he returned home from work. The stress he experienced from his role as a partner in a law firm was evident. He was short-tempered and unsupportive of how his wife's day had gone. His wife, also a lawyer, felt ignored regarding the stress she had experienced during the day taking care of their two-year old daughter and two other children from each of their previous marriages. He also felt self-imposed pressure from his wife because his son (from a former marriage) continued to present her with parenting challenges that had initially brought them into coaching. Since they were so immersed in their habitual ways of relating, the challenge for them was to become aware of how each one set the other off in a recurring pattern of feeding off each other's stress.

Intervention: *Supporting the couple included a primary focus on heightening awareness. As their awareness grew, they began to design better ways to address their parenting needs.*

Mobilizing and Acting

Parents must learn how to act as effective leaders of their familiy, mobilizing members towards positive action. This often involves creating incentives, supporting positive behavior, and dealing with resistance to change. Parental

responsibility requires providing direction to family members to act according to what is developmentally appropriate and possible. Such leadership frequently entails establishing and encouraging small and achievable incremental steps. Here is a case example:

> *A husband and wife complained that their oldest teenage child "stole" food from a larder they kept in their basement. They were neither willing to lock the larder nor change their pattern of punishing this child each time a "theft" occurred, most often when this teenager had friends visiting. Their approach continued and escalated even though these punishments had no effect on his behavior. Their insistence that the problem lay with the child presented a challenge that persisted until they agreed to try some new strategies.*

> **Intervention:** *First, the parents accepted responsibility for establishing an "attractive nuisance" their child could not resist. They also accepted that their initial coaching goal of changing the child's behavior, which they as parents had identified and constructed, was unreasonable. Then they created and implemented a strategic plan: Instead of continuing to define the larder as "off limits," they decided to instill trust by requiring their son to "check off" which items he took so that they could be replaced. This simple solution diffused the purported problem and had other positive, long-term consequences. By being encouraged to identify specific strategies, the parents could work to eliminate the problem and "de-identify" their child as the source of their difficulties.*

One important difference between organizational coaching and family coaching is that families get to practice new ways of behaving in the natural environment of their home. Indeed, the family home typically serves as the "base of operations" for parents and children on a daily basis. It is where parents have the authority to exercise comprehensive control, not only over how they and their children behave, but also over how they all respond to assigned responsibilities. Weekly experiments are easily centered on the daily tasks of living: e.g., morning or bedtime routine, mealtime, maintenance tasks (e.g., taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow), or completion of homework. The coach's goal is to encourage parents to try out new ways of acting, of influencing their children's behavior at home, and of observing the outcome until the goals are achieved.

The impact of the home on behavior becomes apparent and important especially in coaching separated or divorced parents. In these situations, each home presents unique and discrete challenges for the coach. How can the coach better assist each parent in bridging the differences between the two households regarding rules, values, and priorities? Helping parents appreciate

the importance of *consistency* between homes is one of the fundamental goals of GPC coaches. In times of disagreement regarding parenting philosophies, it is important to teach parents to put their children first.

Integration (Assimilation)

In GPC coaching, the family is provided with weekly opportunities to debrief their experiences and discuss what they have learned. Putting their experiences into words helps the learning "stick to the bones." Here is a case example:

> *The father of a seven-year-old child diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome came into coaching with his second wife, primarily because he was challenged by his son's noncompliant behavior. His wife was less patient with her stepson's misbehavior, so they had agreed that the father would take primary responsibility for management. The father's initial approach was either to give in to his son or to punish him.*
>
> **Intervention:** *Over time this father acquired new skills, learning to apply an array of tools consistently and effectively. They included the capacity to identify his son's attention-getting behaviors and to respond strategically with awareness and intention. He learned to ignore such behaviors when appropriate, and to provide attention when his son exhibited positive and constructive ways of acting. Over the next year and a half, this boy became more responsive not only to his father but also to his stepmother. Important parts of our work together were the ongoing "debriefing" conversations with both parents regarding what worked and what did not. In their "integration" discussions, it became apparent to them that they had acquired new and more effective strategies they could use on a daily basis.*

Unfinished Business

Parenting styles are largely acquired during one's childhood. As we grow, we gradually transfer these approaches into adulthood without awareness. When we have children, we often select or reject certain ways of behaving based upon these earlier experiences. "I will never hit or yell at my children," or "I will take them places and tell them how much I love them," become internalized parenting models or directives we pursue. Yet we are often unaware of which stressful situations may bring out old and ineffective, and even seemingly discarded, patterns of behavior. On these occasions, we may mimic or revert to ways of behaving we would otherwise not endorse, e.g., "I promised myself I would never punish my children by sending them to their

rooms." We tend to act reflexively in ways we may consciously reject but which were deeply instilled in us as children.

A major reason for parents' inability to shift to more effective parenting is their unfinished business, i.e., the residual emotional and psychological impact of how they were raised, and taught to expect how parents behave. Finding constructive and successful solutions becomes almost impossible if one continues to misidentify and mislabel reasons for failure that are due to unfinished business. "Old habits die hard" is a well-worn cliché that pointedly references how well-established, habitual ways of parenting persist over time, even when those behaviors prove ineffective or even counterproductive. GPC explores the influence the family of origin has had on current practices and styles, helping parents become aware of how their unfinished business plays a role in interactions with their children. Without that awareness, they will most likely continue to utilize uninformed, outdated parenting methods. Should they either be unable or disinclined to look at and understand the influences and teachings that came before, they will reflect the dictum of Sir Edmund Burke (1729-1797), founder of modern political conservatism: "Those who cannot remember the past are destined to repeat it."

Knowing that one cannot change the past may engender some remorse for time wasted or opportunities lost. But knowing where one has been can also help lead to where one should be going and to ways of charting a new course of action. Knowing what we desire our parenting style to be helps to safeguard against our revisiting or recreating past, ineffective ways of parenting. Here is a case example:

> *A couple that had married in their late thirties rarely agreed on anything to do with child rearing. Their 13-year old marriage ended in a bitter, contentious divorce, which was in process when I was engaged as their coach. Although the mother came to one or two sessions and claimed to be supportive of the process, she quickly withdrew, leaving the father to continue alone. She is estranged from her entire family of origin and neither visits nor shares holidays or her children's birthdays with them. He is still closely connected to his family of origin; he stays in touch and shares special occasions not only with them but also with her family. In fact, her parents agreed to come to coaching sessions. His style of parenting includes frequently hugging of his daughters, taking them on vacations and out to restaurants, and engaging in activities with them; hers is to remain distant. They had no awareness of how their families of origin influenced their behavior as parents. His strong family connection and her estrangement from her family were being played out again with their own children.*

    Intervention: *After the mother's withdrawal, I continued to coach the father and assist him in developing effective parenting methods appropriate for his 5 and 11-year-old daughters.*

Power and Hierarchy in Families

Hierarchy is defined as "a system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2004). How parents relate to each other's decision-making style, and how they wield power within their relationship and as parents, can be understood in terms of hierarchy. Backman (2007) states that power is a "relational construct" and does not exist in one person. Power exists in the context of the overlapping boundaries and relationships found in all families. The manner in which each parent exercises power in relation to the coparent within the family shapes their children's behavior as well as their own. It forms the blueprint for the ways in which power develops and is exercised. How parents behave in relation to each other and to their children is an outcome of both hierarchy and unfinished business and influences the achievement of parental goals. Here is a case example:

    A professional couple had a rigidly defined hierarchical relationship, with the husband clearly the final arbiter of all things relating to the family. Although the wife had the capacity to be more influential or powerful in the decision-making process, she opted to go along because to oppose would take more energy and time (for follow up) than she was capable of. This impacted the family, for example, in the husband's reluctance to face realistically their oldest child's possible educational and behavioral limitations. Although there was outside encouragement to have the boy evaluated, the father, with the mother's passive cooperation, engaged the boy in various after-school activities, from sports to tutoring, while avoiding situations where his relational and social difficulties would become figural. Eventually, the boy was diagnosed as autistic. Although it is not unusual for parents to remain hopeful, the rigid parental hierarchy around decision-making lengthened the diagnostic process and prevented the parents from helping their son as quickly as they might have.

    Intervention: *Since coaching is not couple's therapy, the focus is on what is best for the child. In this regard, the coach must be aware of the hierarchical structure regarding decision-making.*

To develop trust and openness to change helps the parents see the "good" in the relationship as it stands; and then after trust has been developed, to see what the lack of it has cost the family. Parents must come to understand what is "working" in regard to their individual and combined parenting

styles, so that they understand and accept those behaviors as strengths that can serve as a foundation for future work. Once trust has been developed, however, it is also important for the coach to revisit the less developed aspects of parenting style. Doing so not only creates a sense of perspective, but it also provides opportunities to focus upon what needs to change in order for clients to attain their parenting goals.

Utilizing Naturally Occurring Environmental Supports

GPC encourages the use of naturally occurring and accessible environmental resources to support the family system (Bateson, 1972; L. Perls, 1992). Unlike times past, individuals are likely to move away from their families and the locales where they were raised. Parents can no longer rely on the geographic proximity and psychological closeness of natural supports such as family, religious institutions, or long-term friends; types of support that at one time were taken for granted and under-appreciated. Parents are often unaware of how to identify and utilize other newer, less family-connected resources such as local respite care organizations and other external "natural supports."

Networks that address the community needs of the family may include: community, religious, or secular resources; extended family members; work-related options (flex work schedules, compensatory time); school-related, after-school activity groups (sports teams, student government, drama, music, orchestra, or band); interest groups (computers, chess, cooking, art, etc.); and youth groups (Girl or Boy Scouts, Boy's Club, etc.). All of these resources can be tapped into in order to support parenting efforts. Here is a case example:

> *Parents in a blended family consisting of three children, one from their current marriage and one from each of their prior ones, worked long hours. They were able to create a meaningful support system by relying on one parent's former mother-in-law, who still felt a connection with her granddaughter she wished to nurture. By providing weekly childcare on specific days, the former mother-in-law gave these parents more flexibility in scheduling chores and school meetings. She helped them not only to alleviate some stress but also to have leisure time to attend coaching sessions!*

Conclusion

GPC is a new form of coaching different from that found in organizational settings. It offers assistance and fresh hope for those families caught up in ineffective patterns of parenting. It supports parents in taking primary responsibility for what occurs in their families, and it encourages their participating more proactively and strategically in achieving their goals. It

does so by providing them access to new, often novel, parenting strategies capable of generating more effective outcomes.

By identifying solutions that fit with each parent's abilities and energy, GPC supports relational, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes. It encourages greater participation on the part of parents in shaping their own, and therefore their family's, ways of being together. It encourages their adopting an "optimistic perspective" and supports their willingness to take risks and experiment with other modes of acting. It encourages them to take primary responsibility for leading in order to achieve the behavioral changes they desire. Gestalt Parent Coaching encourages positive over negative, supportive over critical, active over passive. GPC is collaborative. Parents work systematically with a coach to establish the conditions (roles, rules, boundaries, etc.) and acquire the skills and methods needed to support long-term change in each family member. By retaking control over the "family organization," they achieve their goals. The message to parents is that, if they expect their efforts to be successful in becoming more positive and strategic, they must first become *aware* of themselves, as well as of their partners and children, in terms of how they all behave individually and collectively.

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Appendix A
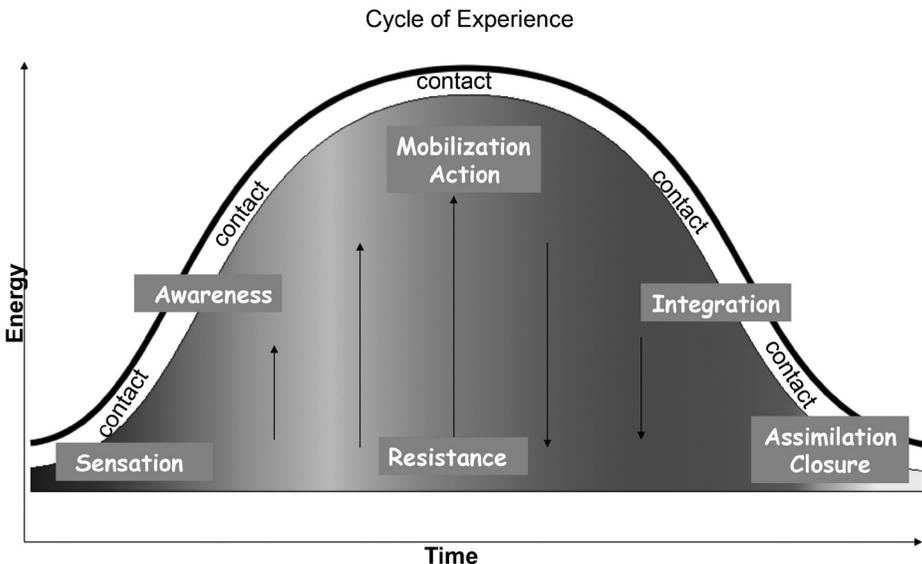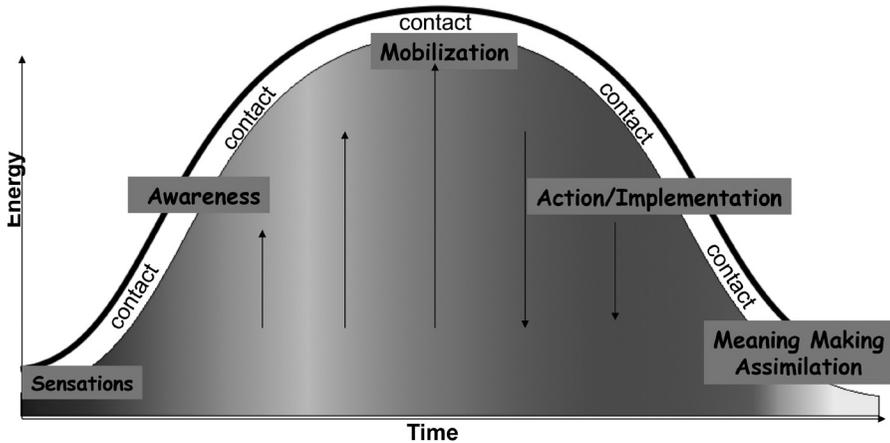**Diagram 1: The Cycle of Experience© Gestalt International Study Center**

Cycle of Experience

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Diagram 2: The Cycle of Experience Applied to Coaching© (2011)

The Cycle of Experience

Appendix B: Supporting Theories of Change

Paradoxical Theory of Change (Beisser, 1970). When individuals (in this instance, parents) become aware of and accept who they are (as parents), rather than trying to be who they are not, long-lasting change can be achieved. **Ecological Theory of Change** (Bateson, 1972). This theory, which complements Beisser's work, focuses on identifying effective interventions and support/respite resources that occur in the natural context of the family and in the environment within which it lives. It also forms part of the foundation of Communications Theory.

Communications Theory (Palo Alto Group: Fisch, Haley, Jackson, Watzlawick, Weakland, *et al.*). Relationships within a family system are interconnected and highly resistant to change. Communication among members has both a *content* and *relationship* component that centers on issues of control. The system can be transformed only when members receive outside help to reframe (institute a change/shift) in their metacommunications.

Positive Psychology/Strengths-Based Theory of Change. This theory emphasizes building on existing individual and family strengths and on available resources, be they familial, environmental (neighbors), or institutional

(schools, clubs, etc.), versus focusing on weaknesses (or, in traditional terms, symptoms). This orientation reflects a "strengths-based" manner of working with clients that contrasts with what was at one time the "deficit" model of working with clients, i.e., what is "right" with clients versus what is "wrong."
Behaviorism (Skinnerian) (Skinner, 1938). Skinner believed that the best way to understand behavior was to look at the causes of an action and its consequences (operant conditioning). Behavior that is reinforced tends to be repeated (i.e., strengthened); behavior that is not reinforced tends to die out or be extinguished (i.e., weakened). Behaviorism is embraced in some way in all of the theories that compose GPC© (Thorndike, 1905). There are specific, experimentally proven, Laws of Behavior that directly influence how new behaviors are acquired, or ineffective behaviors are eliminated. In other words, when one reinforces (rewards or gives attention to) behaviors one want to increase, and does so by providing a reward (e.g., attention, a cookie, a high five), selected behaviors will predictably and immediately increase.
Gestalt Parent Coaching. Coaching is most effective when it supports parents' optimism by embracing opportunities for change through encouragement of increased contact between parents and children. As change agents, parents can significantly increase opportunities within the family in order to achieve coaching goals with respect to shaping and managing behavior.

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