

APPLYING GESTALT THERAPY PRINCIPLES IN COUNSELING A FEMALE ORIENTEER

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The article aims to suggest how a Gestalt therapy (GT) framework can be applied in sport psychology consultations and research. An explanation of GT's theoretical basis (Perls, Hefferline, & Goddard, 2004) and its three pillars (the field theory, phenomenology and the existential dialogue) is followed by a concrete example of its application in a particular performance analysis of a selected youthful orienteer. It is expected that this runner can get a restructured view of her strengths and weaknesses by acknowledging and becoming aware of her actions in successful as well as in failed performances. Since the research topic is relevant and significant only for athletes with the specified experience, a focussed sample has been drawn (Giorgi, 2005; Stake, 2005). In this article, the selected participant is an elite level 16 year old female orienteer who has reached medal positions in national and international competitions. Following GT principles (the field theory, phenomenology, a horizontal level of work in existential dialogue), a phenomenological interview (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) was conducted. This case study shows that GT techniques assist the orienteer in benefitting from experience she gained through both successful as well as failed performances. The runner spotted discrepancies between them and figured out that "a step by step" navigation (secure attack points) would support her performance. Importantly, it was the runner who became aware of how she influences her performance in a positive as well as in a negative way, regardless of the fact that she used to be taught such a strategy before. Instead of getting advice from coaches, the runner formulated it herself. The crucial contribution of Gestalt therapy principles application to sports consists of encouraging athletes to take their own initiative, acknowledge and fully realize the relationship between actions and performance outcome, thereby getting the chance to participate actively and accept the responsibility for their development. Additional investigation is needed in order to estimate the contribution of the Gestalt approach to different age groups and at various performance levels. Further research might also be directed towards applying Gestalt coaching principles, used in organizations, in working with team sports.

Keywords: Gestalt therapy, performance analysis, awareness, orienteering, young athletes.

INTRODUCTION

Sport psychologists have increasingly become interested in the experience of athletes during the past ten years. Dale (1994, 1996, 2000) emphasizes the role of athletes' experience in sport psychology research as a way to improve performance, because it provides athletes with insight into experience where they have handled a difficult situation, or acknowledges how a mistake occurs. The tendency to focus on experience is also echoed in Gestalt therapy (GT). GT focuses on a person's own experience and presumes that becoming aware of one's own functioning in the organismic/environmental field can support personal growth, development and fulfillment of one's potential (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004). Therefore, this paper aims to introduce the basis of the GT theoretical concept, suggest its application in the field of sport psychology and present some practical examples arising from exploring one selected athlete's experience.

The researcher's personal experience of orienteering and GT training facilitates the application of GT principles in a performance analysis in a case study of one female orienteer, described in this article. This 16 year old runner participated in a dialogue in which she explored her experience of both good and bad performances. Evaluation of which performance is good or bad was done subjectively according to the runner's opinion.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gestalt therapy is a phenomenological-existential approach to personal development and growth. As presented by its founders Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (2004), it offers a framework to advance and develop any part of human life. By exploring the individual's complex functioning in context, the Gestalt perspective provides a system capable of surpassing problem resolution and of achieving full potential and joy in life

(Barrett, 1997). Unlike other psychological approaches, Gestalt theoretical psychology and therapy aims to understand and expand the health and freedom of actions in all kinds of situations people encounter in their lives, as opposed to focussing only on pathology and its treatment. Moreover, Gestalt recognizes the inborn drive of all human beings towards health and growth (Andersson, 2008). Changes in direction are realized through awareness. When considering this, it is presumed that the holistic Gestalt theoretical perspective, including Gestalt therapy, can be beneficial to athletes in order for them to learn more about their performances and themselves and move towards prowess in their sport as well as fulfillment in other areas of their lives.

In this study, the theoretical basis of Gestalt theoretical psychology and Gestalt therapy are adopted – especially its field theory, phenomenology and existential dialogue (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004) – in order to explore this runners' experience with successful and failed performances chosen subjectively by the runner. Moreover, it gives full respect to the individual and her phenomenology and aims to find areas of this athlete's growth through awareness supported by horizontal work in existential dialogue. Further, general conclusions will be suggested based on this one case.

The field theory

According to the field theory, the field is a whole in which all the parts relate and are responsive to each other. Every single part is under the influence of occurrences which happen elsewhere in the field (Yontef, 1993). An individual and his/her environment in the broadest sense is contained by the field. In GT, therapists work with here and now, the current state of the field, also encompassing remains of the past and serving as the starting line for the future. It means that all aspects of the field are potentially important at any moment and a person through his/her phenomenology determines what becomes figural and what stays in the indifferent background. In other words, it is the person who defines the field and it is possible to understand its meaning only when we know the observer's viewpoint and circumstances. Therefore, a descriptive approach and observation appear to be the most powerful tools when we attempt to understand the structure of the studied phenomenon (the athlete's experience).

Similarly, this study views the athlete as a whole and in mutual interaction with the surrounding environment. All parts of her field interact continuously and are connected. The athlete influences the field and is formed by interactions with it as well. Even though it is not possible to separate the athlete and the field, there is a contact border – a space where contact processes between the athlete and the field are held. In this space, the athlete develops her specific ways of behavior as

a reaction to interactions with the outside world. An understanding of these contact processes and of the athlete's perception and reactions can highlight areas of further personal growth. In other words, if the athlete understands how she actively forms and lives this contact, identifies and fulfills her needs, she has the chance to explore and fulfill her potential.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology and Gestalt have the same goal "to study multiple possibilities of the field or situation in the way how people, who continuously interchange the field, experience it subjectively" (Mackewn, 2004, 71). The goal of Gestalt phenomenological exploration is awareness, insight and clear understanding of situation by the client. It is presumed that one objective reality does not exist and we can only be opened to various subjective interpretations of reality. According to Resnick (Resnick & Parlett, 1995, 3), the way "how people choose, organize, and contribute to the construction of what becomes figural for them and what background(s) they bring to bear", is critical. In other words, Yontef (1993) agrees that it is crucial how a person becomes aware and what the process of becoming aware is. Moreover, awareness is not possible without a systematical exploration. Awareness has sensory, affective and cognitive facets – it incorporates sensation, thinking and feelings. To be fully aware means that "you know *what* you do, *how* you do it, that there are alternatives, and that you *choose* to do what you do and are the way you are" (Andersson, 2008, 2). A person feels that he/she is in control of and responsible for his/her own feelings, choices and behavior. Therefore, awareness represents the primary goal of exploration in Gestalt therapy.

Each person creates his/her own subjective meaning of the experience and in the phenomenological exploration he/she learns how to become aware of awareness. Transferred to the sport environment, e.g. training, can be effective only when it respects the specificity of each individual and his/her phenomenology. Also mental training cannot be started without detailed information about the athlete's way of organizing his/her perception and experience in practice and competitions and becoming aware of his/her functioning in the organismic/environmental field. During training, athletes learn how to manage their tasks, even though they do not have to be aware of the concrete actions they are taking. Similarly, athletes adopt their styles of failing, also mostly without understanding the process itself. There are many ways of task solution in sports. Athletes learn to use those which serve as a *creative adaptation* (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004) to manage the goal. On the other hand, athletes get into difficulties when it becomes a stereotyped strategy and is used in all kinds of situations and cannot be changed flexibly according

to the present settings. It becomes a rigid action, not a choice. The first step towards free choice leads through deeper awareness of what happens at the contact border when the athlete manages or fails and how it serves the athlete's needs and goals and fulfills his/her potential as an athlete and as a person as well.

The existential dialogue

In GT, the existential dialogue is a means of awareness development, learning, problem solving and self growth. Relationship grows out of contact (Yontef, 1993). This represents a core concept of Gestalt psychotherapy (Mackewn, 2004). The relationship between the therapist and the client provides space to study the ways how the client creates his/her perception in some stereotyped way and thereby prevents himself/herself from personal growth. Therefore the quality of the relationship is crucial. The contact is a process and is experienced as a boundary between me and not me. The boundary separates me and not me and at the same time represents a space for connections between them (A. Polák, unpublished lecture). In this boundary space, a person can experience contact with not me aspects of the field while preserving his/her own identity. Therefore, a person needs support in order to be able to enter and experience the dynamic of contact and withdrawal.

From the Gestalt therapy point of view, people are their own best experts on themselves and on what is best for them. Since they survive in the world, they have managed creative adaptation at certain periods of their lives and learnt to overcome problems. However, once such a behavior or perception becomes stereotyped, it limits the person from full contact with reality and reduces support for self standing decisions and free choice. In therapy, by engaging in dialogue, they can move towards the desired change with full responsibility. In other words, the therapist refuses to be the agent of the change; however he/she helps the person to find new ways and possibilities to change what they are not satisfied with. It is the person who makes the change.

Similarly, the approach of the researcher in this study is inspired by a horizontal level of work in the existential dialogue and the function of the contact and withdrawal. The basis for such a contact lies in acceptance, authenticity, common language and self responsibility (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004). It requires respect for two different phenomenologies – those of the athlete and the researcher. Klajnsčec (1997, 445–446) is probably the only coach who has applied the Gestalt approach in his work with a karate competitor, and described that “his attitude towards the competitor is personal, on an experimental level. He is trained to enter the phenomenological world of this competitor to experience his point of view and his opinions together with him”. Moreover, this requires a close and personal

contact and a constant focus on the competitor's here and now. Contrary to a traditional top down approach, such a coach attempts to have the competitor direct his/her training himself/herself as much as possible and take responsibility. At the same time, the coach also has to be self confident, trained and has to accept an active and creative role in training adaptation and planning.

With regard to the fact that an athlete is the best expert on himself/herself and knows the most suitable way of development in his/her sport, it is supposed that he/she can move towards his/her potential when he/she becomes involved in the exploration of patterns through which he/she actively creates his/her functioning in training and competitions. In terms of the field theory, participation in sport is an inseparable part of the organismic/environmental field with a direct contact at the contact border. This is closely connected with the paradoxical theory of change. Even though Frederic Perls did not explicitly delineate this theory, he is considered to be its author since it underlies most of his work and the Gestalt techniques he developed. It was Beisser (1970, 77) who wrote the most referenced article about this phenomenon, named it *the paradoxical theory of change* and defined “that change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not”, which also means that “change can occur when the patient abandons, at least for the moment, what he would like to become and attempts to be what he is”. Put simply, no one else can directly change the person passively. Help is attainable only through contact with the present situation. It is only possible to find a way towards the intended change when the person is aware of the present position and settings and then he/she is able to move further.

Contrary to analytical approaches, the Gestalt therapist refuses the role of “the changer” (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004). “The premise is that one must stand in one place in order to have a firm footing to move on and that it is difficult or impossible to move without that footing” (Beisser, 1970, 77). The therapist encourages the client to be where and what he/she is. The main goal of Gestalt therapy is to elaborate the client's awareness as means which enlarges the scale of the client's possible reactions and strengthens his/her flexibility (Mackewn, 2004). Similarly, Yontef (1993) states that in GT the person learns to use his/her internal and external sense to become self responsible and self supportive by the process of awareness.

SAMPLING AND METHODS

The presented data describes one case which is also a part of a doctoral thesis about youth orienteers (n = 8). Since the research topic is relevant and significant only

for people with this specified experience, a focussed sample was drawn (Giorgi, 2005; Stake, 2005). Permission to conduct this research was given by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Physical Cultural (email communication, March 21, 2007). The participant (female, age 16) and her parents signed an informed consent statement following the requirements of ethical principles and the code of conduct (American Psychological Association, 2002). The data was collected by means of Phenomenological Interview (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) and IAW GT principles (the field theory, phenomenology and existential dialogue).

The described case presents a 16 year old elite level female orienteer who placed among the top five in the national ranking for 2006 and 2007 and has experience with international competitions.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF GT PRINCIPLES IN A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

The author of this article used her own experience with orienteering and her GT training and attempted to apply Gestalt therapy principles in post competition analysis with an orienteer. They focused on the orienteers' experience with her successful and failed performances as she evaluated them subjectively.

In this case study, the athlete and the researcher explored relations between the athlete and her environment – how the athlete handles practices and competitions (or their parts) to satisfy her needs and how the sport influences her back. They searched for the athlete's self support in order to help her to be in charge of changes leading towards fulfilling her personal and athletic potential. The focus was put on the process. In general, an athlete becomes aware of his/her reactions and emotions and learns to understand them in the context of the given sport and the broader environment. Moreover, according to the paradoxical theory of change (Beisser, 1970), if the athlete finds these reactions and emotions inefficient, he/she has the possibility to acquire more effective ones. In other words, acknowledgement of the present state of perception and experiencing is the only way to change what a person is dissatisfied with.

In the existential-phenomenological dialogue, maps with drawn route choices were used to help the runner to recall situations in competitions. Contrary to the usual post competition analyses, they focused on failed as well as on flawless performances in order to capture all aspects of the organismic/environmental field.

Trying to keep a horizontal plane in the existential dialogue, the researcher made every effort to stay on the level of the runner's experience without imposing her experience with orienteering; however, she shared her

experience and ideas in the dialogue when she considered them as contributing.

In order to show the strategy based on Gestalt principles and its use in performance analysis in orienteering, examples from the dialogue follow:

Note: researcher's quotes are written in underlined italics, participant's quotes are written in *italics*.

- Exploration of runner's previous experience:

„Do you analyze maps with your coaches? Have you found out something by doing so?“

“We kind of don't analyze it. We always... I just make some mistakes and don't know about more analyzing. I always know how I made that mistake.“

Here, it was revealed that only performances with mistakes were considered to deserve some more attention. At the beginning, the researcher had to help the runner to overcome the feeling that it is not worth talking about her good performances because she felt it happened without her contribution. Therefore, they focused on small concrete parts of successful races.

- Exploration of how she managed to find some control points without mistakes in her successful performances:

“And how did you do it that you found this control point just fine?“

“...that I went to the path, around this (pointing on the map), that I could see this and I knew that the control point would be here. From this one I set my direction and this was visible so much that you'd recognize it easily and I followed the direction...and this control point – I run down here perfectly, to the path, over this and towards this.“

(...)

“...try to describe this race further.“

“Afterwards I went down, on the path and knew that I had to climb up here and along the meadow and then I saw the control point. So I found it ok.“

“I see. Can you continue?“

“After that I set the direction, that I couldn't run too much down because then I'd have to go up again... so I had my bearings, but didn't know precisely where to but I followed the direction and knew that these trees would stop me. So I knew exactly that I'm passing these two valleys and here I knew perfectly where I was. Then here I knew that I was by these trees here.“

“I see.“

“And also up here I knew it very well. I didn't plan to see this but it was just there so I checked it with the map and it was there... Then I ran and ran and so this tree and the control point just popped up in front of me.“

“Hmm. Does this mean that you didn't focus at all?“

“No,... I had an idea.“

“Did you enjoy that?“

“Yes, very much, the whole race!“

“How did you feel before the start of this race?“

"Well, I looked forward to it. I felt at ease, completely. Not that I'd prepared too much that I'd have to run excellently, not that..."

- Enhancing awareness:

"And this control – I just went towards the tree and it was visible."

"What did you follow, then?"

"This was a bigger valley and I held the bearing and ran this direction and saw this tree."

It occurred many times throughout the interview that the runner remarked some control point as having been easy and well visible and did not feel that she had done certain steps in order to nail it so precisely. However, when she was asked what she followed to find it, she always reported properly planned attack points and/or directions and felt herself to be in full control over the leg (a leg = the space between two control points).

- Checking her experience and leading her to deeper awareness:

"Here I just went... I needed to get here and start to read the map, so I got there and got to this control point. I was lucky to find it."

"Only lucky?"

"Ehm, I had the direction, a rough direction, I didn't know I was going to find it."

"Could you have done it differently?"

"Set the bearing turning the wheel precisely, look and run there following the compass."

"What made you not do it in that way?"

"I just decided differently. It seemed to be unnecessary, I thought that I'd just find it somehow and I was lucky."

"Does this mean that when this appears – I'll find it somehow – you need to be lucky as well?"

"Yes, I guess so."

- Giving an opportunity to realize how losing focus and refocusing occur:

"...when I know that I'm on the right path and I find the control point, I don't think about it, I just know that I'm right. But when I have an idea that it's wrong, and a couple of times it happened that I felt that it was wrong, but it was right..."

"According to me, it sounds like a matter of balancing the speed of running and the speed of map reading." (Reflection of the researcher's idea.)

"Yes, I think so."

"And it also seems to me that it doesn't fit sometimes."

"Yes, that's right. Or more like that I think about something else and run without paying attention to the map so much... that I don't notice a crossing and continue running. And then I can't see this on the map because I don't expect it to come."

"Do you use some tricks to get back to your map?" (Exploration of her strategy.)

"Yes, I have some. That I run and must tell myself – well this point, after this one I have to get to this feature and so on."

"Does this keep your attention focused?"

"Definitely, it does. It makes me know that this feature is coming and this one does afterwards. And then it just has to be there."

"What do you do when you don't see the expected feature?"

(Exploration of polarities which leads to new discovery.)

"But it is there – almost always! Because when I want it, it is there."

- Getting to new awareness through reflecting and reformulating:

"So you didn't try to relocate in the map. What did you do instead?"

"When I'm thinking about it now, I rather continue running in order not to lose than to look and look for something, because it takes time."

"I wonder if it doesn't take time when you continue running."

"I don't think so because I may be at the right place."

"I see." (Pause.)

"Because for example I don't know yet that I've got lost."

"Is there some sense that something is not alright?"

"Yes, there is. But I can say that when I do it like this, even though when I sense it, sometimes it's right and I find the control point."

"Well."

"That's like that I'm waiting till then and that's why I make those huge mistakes."

"I see... Have you ever realized this?"

"No, not at all."

"It makes sense to me."

"Because when I make a mistake, I know it intuitively at the beginning."

"Do you mean that you can recognize the beginning of the mistake by some kind of intuition?"

"Yes, it kind of doesn't match there a bit. But I tell myself: ehm, it doesn't fit, it doesn't have to, maybe the map... and I just think that something fits approximately and that's why I might be right. So I wait a bit longer and sometimes it happened that I found the control point at that moment. So I wait even longer and start to look for it and then I find out... when I find out that I'm completely wrong, then it's been quite a while."

- Exploration of catching her refocus after she made a mistake and comparison with other successful performances:

"That I told myself – you'd screwed up now and you'd find the next one clearly, so you have to follow those points. So now, when we are talking, I know that I'll follow these features."

"Is that right?"

"Of course. Because it's a way of finding a control point. This may work."

"Did you do it this way now at the Saturday's competition?"

"But I've figured it out just now at this very moment that I'll follow the points! So far this fall, I've been running so... that it went just by itself. I didn't have to think too much about it."

"Can you show me which competition, for example?"

"For example this one... I didn't think about it so much as before and it just went fine... I just knew that I'll go there and there."

"Can you describe it?"

"Well, that I knew I had to go there. And then I saw this path, so it was possible to run around. Then I found out it was much better to run this way. So I got there, followed the path up to this, down, along this tree... all the way down and I found the control point beautifully..."

"I see."

"But I really didn't think about where to go."

"OK, you didn't."

"No."

"That what you've just described now didn't seem to me to be 'not thinking'."

"Maybe in the forest. But not like that I'd focused especially that now I'll go to this..."

"What did you focus on then at this place? (Pointing to the place on the map.) What you were gonna do in the evening?"

"No, not at all. But like, that now I'll go to this, this, this and this. That's what I focused on there but it went just by itself. Do you understand?"

"What does it mean for you that 'it went by itself'?"

"It means that I didn't have to think and it went fine in this race, I didn't have to tune in."

"How did you feel? Were you tuned in?"

"Yes, I was."

"It seems to me that you did what was needed without pushing yourself into it."

"Yes."

- A deeper exploration of the situation when the runner meets an opponent in the forest:

"I don't know, it usually happens when I read the map to the next control point in advance. So I just can't plan the next one, otherwise I shift."

"I see."

"But here it wasn't that case... I don't know why. I just was here but thought that I was here and was looking for this control point."

"Well, when you turned from this road, what did you start with? I mean in your mind."

"Oh, now I know, from this path I wanted to go in between this and this all the way down to this small valley. But I caught some girl - and thought that she must also go there. So I looked at the map to find out where I was, but

the shift occurred (she looked at the next control point). It shifted because of this."

"Because of that girl?"

"Yes that I got stuck here. I was heading the right direction, but I saw she was looking for something there as well, so I wanted to check the map once again but I moved my finger..."

- The researcher offers her phenomenology as a description:

"Well, you are looking at the map."

"Yes, I do but here it was a kind of a blackout, I don't know. I'd usually run around and the path to the control point."

"I just have an idea but I don't know if it is right. That this control point, when you started to be little bit insecure, so you wanted to speed up afterwards and that's why you checked the next route choice quite shortly to consider possibilities. You just thought that it's clear."

"Yes, I think that it might have been that way."

When the researcher wants to test her hypothesis, it is allowed to bring it into the dialogue. However, it has to be stated as an idea of the researcher in a descriptive manner, so the runner has the possibility to refuse it. Even if the runner does not accept it, it can bring up some other association and deepen awareness.

- Exploring her experience in successful races in order to enhance her awareness of her contribution.

"How do you feel when it goes fine?"

"When I enjoy the race, I don't have to even think about it. Everything just pops up itself as it should, I do the right steps without even thinking about them, so as..."

"Well, how does it happen then? How do you do it that it pops up?"

"Well, probably that I even... when I'm at some place that I tell myself that now I'll get there, over the valley, there will be this... I make sure that I'm there, take another path, then, for example, take off and follow one direction up to something and get there following the landmarks."

"For me, it sounds like you participate very actively and make choices."

"That's right, I create it. But I don't think about how I should be doing that."

"Oh, I see."

"That's what it's about!"

"I wonder what makes you do it this way."

"Well, now, to run the race well, I'd do it in this way - I'll tell myself those points where to go. I'll be making sure that they are there and that I'll find control points. I don't have to be afraid of getting lost because I'll know where I am at every moment."

"Has this been your tactic?"

"No, I've just created it. I've just found out how to do it."

We tried to use her newly gained awareness of tactics in the preparation for the next race. It was a national championship. Even though it was one of the most important races of the year, she suggested using this, seemingly simple, "step by step" tactic there. She felt very self confident and sure that it would help her to perform at her best.

The "step by step" strategy is shown on Fig. 1. As mentioned before, flawless legs and competitions were usually omitted from post competition analyses with her coach. The whole focus was mostly directed towards failed races and she got advice about how to avoid such a mistake next time. However, in the dialogue with the researcher, she was encouraged to describe her good performances thoroughly as well.

When talking with the researcher, the runner was encouraged to describe her strategy on many good legs and route choices in order to formulate her routines. On the other hand, she described also the competitions in which she failed. The runner herself spotted discrepancies between them and figured out what kind of navigation tactic works for her. The researcher suggested that the runner can draw single landmarks directly onto maps with successful route choices (Fig. 1). She made a new discovery about what helps her to find control points flawlessly. Moreover, considering the stress inducing situation (e.g. at important races), she said that she *"can perform well only when I follow this. I must follow attack points"*. Once she has become aware of this, she reported that she feels calmer and more self confident before races because her strategy is clear and she knows what to do. She has a trustworthy plan to follow. It has to be said that her coaches had been teaching her this strategy for a long time; however, now she felt that she had made a new discovery.

Even though she had not been asked to report her performance on the next competition to the researcher, she sent an email spontaneously and wrote that during our meeting, *"I realized how I should run in the forest and now at the weekend I tried it and it really worked. We came to the conclusion that I should run from a point to a point (step by step). When I said this to my coaches, they smiled and asked if I'd ever listened to them when they were giving me advice. I think that it was because you made me find it out myself."* She won this important race. Such spontaneous feedback from the runner underlines the importance of one's own experience for performance enhancement.

In conclusion, this orienteer sometimes struggles with bigger mistakes (usually for at least some minutes), particularly in national and international level competitions; however, she manages to complete flawless races as well. Before the exploration based on Gestalt principles, this orienteer understood why she made some mistakes, but she was not able to describe how she managed to orient precisely. Since she had an opportunity to

describe and share her experience with failed as well as successful performances and compare them in the dialogue with the researcher, she enhanced her awareness of the process and her experience. Based on new findings, her self support was fostered and she got actively involved in the application of the new strategy in the next competition. This does not necessarily mean that this orienteer will not make these mistakes, but now she has acquired sensitivity to these situations and become aware of them. Therefore, self support is mobilized and a way to possible change is open. Responsibility for the work on the intended change emerges from the orienteer herself and seems to have a stronger meaning for her.

CONCLUSIONS

The article introduces the basis of Gestalt therapy principles and seeks opportunities to test its applicability in the field of sport psychology. Based on theoretical assumptions, it seems that various topics and problems in training and competitions can be approached within the framework of Gestalt therapy due to its phenomenological-existential background, the field theory and the presumption that people have a natural drive to personal development and growth.

From a practical point of view, the experience with the application of Gestalt principles in performance analysis in orienteering showed changes in the orienteer's awareness. Performance-enhancing and performance-debilitating actions, thoughts and feelings were identified and thereby the runner's awareness was extended considerably. Although characteristics of failed performances are well known among orienteering coaches, it was the orienteer who found out and understood the influence of these concrete characteristics in her case. The crucial contribution of Gestalt therapy principles application in sports is that the athlete is encouraged to take their own initiative, acknowledge and fully realize the relationship between her actions and performance outcomes. Then he/she can find the place from where to start and what to work on in training sessions. At the same time, her own understanding and awareness bring along stronger individual involvement.

In general, the Gestalt approach emphasizes awareness as an important means of personal development. Therefore, in coaching praxis, a more horizontal relationship between a coach and an athlete might be considered to be a topic for further research. Furthermore, additional investigation is needed in order to estimate the contribution of the Gestalt approach for different age groups and various performance levels in orienteering and other individual sports. It also seems interesting to try to apply Gestalt coaching principles, used in organizations, in working with team sports.

Fig. 1

Examples of “a step by step” strategy



It was drawn by the female runner. Circles with numbers (connected by straight lines) are control points and legs of the printed course. The crooked line shows the route choice the runner took and was drawn after the race. Full points are the attack points she chose when she was carrying out the route choice. During the dialogue, she became aware of this navigation technique because she used it only unconsciously. Now it is accessible in her mind when she decides to use it in competition.

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VYUŽITÍ PRINCIPŮ GESTALT TERAPIE V PORADENSTVÍ PRO ORIENTAČNÍ BĚŽKYNI (Souhrn anglického textu)

Článek prezentuje základní teoretické principy Gestalt terapie (GT) a hledá možnosti jejich aplikace ve sportovní psychologii. GT (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 2004) vychází z existenciálně-fenomenologických základů, teorie pole, existenciálního dialogu a předpokladu, že lidé se rodí s přirozenou tendencí k osobnostnímu rozvoji. V druhé části příspěvku je uveden příklad použití rámce GT v rozboru výkonů orientační běžkyně

dorosteneckého věku. Předpokládali jsme, že dorostenka může lépe pochopit své silné a slabé stránky, pokud bude podporována, aby si uvědomila souvislost svých reakcí při úspěšných a neúspěšných výkonech. Vzhledem k relevantnosti výzkumného tématu pouze pro úzce specifikovanou skupinu osob byl proveden záměrný výběr výzkumného souboru (Giorgi, 2005; Stake, 2005). V této studii je participantem šestnáctiletá orientační běžkyně, která dosáhla medailových pozic v národních i mezinárodních závodech. Za použití GT principů byl proveden fenomenologický rozhovor (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Z rozhovoru vyplývá, že GT techniky napomohly dorostence profitovat ze zkušeností z úspěšných i neúspěšných výkonů. Sama identifikovala rozpor mezi nimi a došla k tomu, že navigační strategie podle záchytných bodů (krok za krokem) podporuje její dobrý výkon. I přesto, že ji trenéři tuto taktiku radili již dříve, považujeme v tomto případě za klíčové, že ji uchopila dorostenka sama a pochopila její konkrétní použití ve svém individuálním případě (místo přijímání rad na ni přišla sama). Zásadní přínos aplikace GT principů do sportovní psychologie tkví v tom, že podporuje sportovce v převzetí iniciativy, uvědomění si svého vlivu na výkon, a tím dostává šanci se aktivně zapojit do svého rozvoje a převzít za něj zodpovědnost. Vedení dalšího výzkumu by mohlo směřovat k zhodnocení přínosu GT přístupu v práci s různými věkovými skupinami a výkonnostními úrovněmi a také k longitudinálnímu sledování vývoje jednotlivých sportovců. Zajímavá by mohla být aplikace Gestalt coachingu v týmových sportech.

Klíčová slova: Gestalt terapie, analýza výkonu, uvědomění si, orientační závod, mladí sportovci.

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