

Pathways of Song

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Abstract

In this workshop, we experienced the excitement that occurs when singing activities are utilized as experiments in Gestalt therapy. By attending to process phenomena throughout, the workshop delineated how vocal activities used in a Gestalt therapy context differ from those undertaken in music therapy or other expressive therapies.

We engaged in a wide range of experiments. First, we worked with breathing awareness, to prepare the way for phonation. Attending to this aspect of id functioning heightened individuals' awareness of self in the moment. Then we explored the making of abstract tones and the boundary between silence and sound. Participants became aware of their particular ways of self-mobilizing to accomplish being heard. Longheld expectations grounded in personality function, including "Will I be heard?" and "Do you hear me as I hear myself?" came to the foreground. Throughout, we worked in different configurations, including dyads, small groups, and group as a whole.

Next, we sang a song, which added text to the aesthetic experiences of melody, pitch, and timbre. The text's storytelling brought a new dimension to the work as we explored our reactions to it. Soon, many technical questions about throat comfort, breath support, jaw release, and related physical experiences began to be expressed. We experimented with ways of encountering these topics and the retroreflections they evinced. Along with the ensuing practical exercises, group members began to relate personal experiences of singing and of music lessons in their childhoods. Much emotion flowed, which both the small groups and the group as a whole creatively supported.

We continued in small groups, where each person talked of a song that held special importance for him or her, speaking about it, and in some cases, singing it. We then returned to our group as a whole and, standing in a circle, ended with a sung go-round in which each group member sang a portion of a song, some persons risking to sing for the first time in many years. We could feel clearly then how the group endeavor supported individual effort and how our experimenting with singing had taken us far from our beginning in this

workshop.

Readers may obtain the complete article from Gestalt Review where it appeared in the 2000 issue, Volume 4, Number 2.