



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTAINER IN THE EQUINE GESTALT COACHING METHOD™

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Introduction: This capstone illustrates the key to a successful Gestalt experience within a group setting, along with equine partners. The container and the subsequent step into contact with a participant from the group are the foundation of a full experience. The container is a holding space and mindfulness, a covenant with the group, holding the participant at the highest level of compassion and respect. The space itself is sacred. The container is also a covenant of the work, never leaving the sanctity of the group's presence. This assures the participant that safety, validation, and trust are present, the solid foundation upon which the energy moves. Contact, then, a deep listening and connection between the Gestaltist and the participant is possible, further evoking a feeling of safety, being heard, and surrounded by deep compassion. As a result, vulnerability and movement into a piece of work are possible.

Significance: In the experiential work of Gestalt, the results are somatic, energetic, and cathartic. The foundation is the container. The container is the collective energetic space created by the group under the direction of the Gestaltist. It is the core from which a participant is anchored in safety, while on a journey to gain inner awareness, move through an experience, and release past negative energy. The magic is in the container (Melisa Pearce). This capstone demonstrates the importance of an effective container to the work, a positive, transformative shift in the outlook and charge of a previous trauma, toxic event, or painful experience from the participant's past (background). These events, undetected and unreleased, affect the participant's reactions to present situations (foreground).

Purpose: This capstone was designed to illustrate and stress the importance of a viable, functioning container as the first key step in a willing participant's journey. Finding the charge and releasing its negative energy brings awareness and peace, allowing the participant to move into the future, calmly responding instead of reacting to life's events.

Setting and Participants: Coaching sessions were held at The DK Ranch, located in Larimer County, Colorado. The demographics of this group are as follows: Adult women ages 35 to 68, whose life roles include caregiving of some type, familial or occupational, or both. Six participants were surveyed. Each participant voluntarily filled out a written survey for at least 2 sessions. The survey incorporated a numeric rating of how participants were feeling pre- and post-sessions. The two feelings evaluated were "anxiety" and "depression" on a scale of 0-10, with 10 representing the most intense feeling. A series of Yes/No questions were posed to assess

the viability of the container. The questions related to the participants feeling safe, supported, and in a conducive environment with deep listening and no distractions by the Gestalt therapist and other group members. A numeric scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest favorable score, was used to rate the overall session, and optionally, participants were invited to write their comments to support their scores.

Capstone Description/Process: I was the sole provider of the EGCM™ coaching sessions. All Gestalt pieces involved participants interacting during a portion of their session with a horse, at liberty, in a 60-foot round pen. Data from the surveys were collected upon completion of each 3-hour session.

Capstone Results/Impact: With respect to specific questions about the container itself, a “Yes” reply was at 100% for feelings of safety, a conducive environment, and feeling supported by the Gestaltist and other group members. Scores from pre-session to post-session anxiety showed a significant decrease overall of 2.8 times for pre- vs. post- depression. The rating of the overall session experience score (1-10) was averaged across all scores received and was 9.8/10. Reflections shared by participants included “feeling heard, supported, validated, lighter, strengthened, more mindful of self and others, and more hopeful for healing.”

Capstone Evaluation: For all participants, the container was the key to their ability to do the work and/or gain insights from observing another participant’s experience.

Future Directions: Next steps that may emerge from this capstone may be to evaluate the closing container and the Gestaltist’s role in connecting the dots between a participant’s foreground (present experience) and the background (past event). Also, of importance to further study in the closing container might be a participant’s sharing their ah-ha moment from the session, what they will take away to process, and finally, what they will leave behind in the sands of the arena.

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Class Content: Melisa Pearce