Gestalt Theory in the Field of Educational Psychology: An example

Contribution to the 1st GTA Symposium in Helsinki, Finland, Celebrating 100 Years Gestalt Psychology September 29th, 2012
Gestalt Theory in the Field of Educational Psychology -

Introduction

• Gestalt Theory (including Field Theory) as theoretical background for
• applications in interpersonal contexts
• is useful, but
• is no contemporary issue in the University education for prospective teachers
Gestalt Theory in the Field of Educational Psychology -
Structure of the Talk:

• Introduction
• Gestalt Theoretical & Field Theoretical Basics for
Prospective Teachers
• A Seminar at the University of Education
  – Circumstances and Preconditions
  – Topics and Schedule
  – What happened? Own Observations and
  – Students’ Feedback
• Conclusions for Further Seminars
• some Gestalt Psychological basics
• Epistemology: Critical Realism
• Phenomenological Orientation
• Gestalt Theoretical Anthropology
• Basic ideas on learning and education in the sense of Lewin and Metzger, concerning:
  – learning and thinking as creative processes
  – motivation
  – social climate
  – characteristics of working at the living
Historical Start: Gestalt Theoretical Ancestors

Max Wertheimer (1890-1943)

Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967)

Kurt Koffka (1886-1941)

Kurt Lewin (1890-1947)

Wolfgang Metzger (1899-1979)
A Seminar at the University of Education: Circumstances and Preconditions

• Title: Gestalt theory and Field Theory in the context of education and development
• Participants: 35 young women, 2\textsuperscript{nd}-6\textsuperscript{th} sem.
• Pre-information about Gestalt Theory: 😞
• basic motivation: one more seminar, collecting ECTS-points
• short preparation time
A Seminar at the University of Education: Schedule

• Introduction + Organization (team formation, literature) + Input Gestalt theoretical basics (2 lessons)
• Consultation Time (2 lessons)
• Presentations + Discussions (7 lessons)
• Feedback (1 lesson)
A Seminar at the University of Education: Presentation of 7 Special Topics based on Gestalt Theory

- creativity and productive thinking at school
- motivational factors, learning and achievement
- classroom-management, relationships and group dynamics
- diversity and social inclusion in the classroom
- development psychological ideas
- a special topic: resistance ("Trotz")
- self-care for teachers

M. Soff, 2012
A Seminar at the University of Education: What happened? – own phenomenology

• students interested in the presentation of the basics
• literature for introduction: frustrating
• group formation + literature research
• team presentations + discussions
• atmosphere
• quality of the presentations + essays
Illustration GT Basics: Prägnanztendenz

Beispiel für die Wirksamkeit der Prägnanztendenz in der Wahrnehmung:

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Illustration GT Basics: Epistemology, Critical Realism

• „Die Systemgrenzen sind nicht die Grenzen des Einzelorganismus“ (nach Metzger, 1976³)
I. Die Situation bei Interesse an der Sache

Illustration: Motivational Factors
Lewin (1931) Die psychologische Situation bei Lohn und Strafe
Illustration: Developmental Psychology
Lebensraum auf zwei Entwicklungsstufen

Quelle: Lewin (1946 in K LW Bd. 6, 385)
A Seminar at the University of Education: What happened? – own phenomenology

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M. Soff, 2012
Students’ Feedback -1: What was a New Content for You?

25 Feedback-Sheets, free answers:

- What is Gestalt Theory/Field Theory? (5x)
- Influence of GT/FT on psychology (2x)
- Critical Realism for teachers (2x)
- several aspects of developmental psychology (4x)
- motivation, facilitation of motivation (2x)
- self-care for teachers important to stay healthy (4x)
- “I learned that it is important to see my future pupils as a whole and not to judge on the base of a single impression”
Students’ Feedback -2: Your most Important Theoretical Insight?

25 Feedback-Sheets, free answers:

- Critical Realism (5x)
- GT/FT in general as a theoretical background, solutions and explications on a variety of school topics (3x)
- “The whole is not the sum of the pieces” (6x)
- “Prägnanztendenz” in each human being + groups, anthropological aspects (4x)
- Group leading, influence of educators (2x)
- how to deal with stress, anger, “Trotz”, prejudices at school (3x)
Students’ Feedback -3: Seminar Atmosphere?

25 Feedback-Sheets, free answers:

• Good, agreeable learning climate (16 x)
• relaxed atmosphere (3x)
• open, frankly discussions (6x)
• target-oriented, concentrated, disciplined (4x)
• well-prepared presentations (3x)
• it could have been more productive, group puzzle method instead of plenary presentations (2x)
• “For me, the congruence between Gestalt theoretical ideas of human beings and the style of the seminar leader was obvious and therefore practised in the whole seminar”
Students’ Feedback -4: Suggestions for improving?

25 Feedback-Sheets, free answers:

• better organizational structure/overview from the beginning (3x)
• more time / more help for organization of the groups and preparation of the presentations: (6x)
• more basic information at the beginning/more input lectures from the expert lecturer (7x)
• less students’ presentations (5x)
• more information material in completion (6x)
• more integration, reflection, discussion after students’ presentations (6x)
Gestalt Theory in the Field of Educational Psychology: – Conclusions for further Courses

• GT & FT are obviously connective to a lot of contemporary discourses in the field of educational psychology
• GT & FT as theoretical frames for teaching and other processes concerning schools are interesting for young students
• seminar atmosphere with “model function”, at the same time a lot of ideas for improvement
• comprehensible wish of more lecturers input and support, but maintenance of active learning, self-reading, interactive teaching
• more time for questions and reassurance…
Invitation to the 18th Scientific Convention of the GTA
April 11-14, 2013
University of Education, Karlsruhe

www.gestalttheory.net/gta/tagung

Thank you for your Attention!