

**Graham Best**

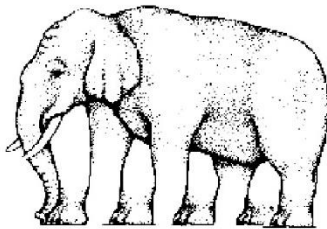
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## Gestalt Tutoring: Slow Down and Be Present

How many legs does this elephant have?



During the day, while my students are in school, I see adult clients for psychotherapy in my therapy office in San Francisco. I love that work, because it emphasizes growth. I love it so much that I'd like to speak right now about the kind of counseling I practice, and articulate at least one fundamental similarity it offers for tutoring well. My suggestion is that the essential ingredient for this style of counseling is also the basis for tutoring to maximum benefit for each student. If you disagree, or have additional ideas, please let me know.

The counseling methodology in which I have my core training is called Gestalt. Don't let that word scare you off. It has a history behind it, of course, but the piece of it that matters most here is that Gestalt therapy places paramount emphasis on increasing one's awareness. What exactly does that idea mean? It means if you are having a problem, feeling stuck, feeling uncomfortable, dissatisfied, restless about yourself, or experiencing any other call to investigate for the sake of change, the most helpful starting point is to grow your awareness of your present situation. The more deeply you get to know the in's and out's of the impasse and permit them all space to reveal their place in it, the more you nourish the conditions for change to take hold.

I won't go into what this process looks like in therapy, not in great detail, but I will say it typically involves slowing down. The same is true for tutoring. When a student wants to improve performance in virtually any subject, the outward appearance of how it happens is that the student is slowing down to acquaint better with the specific characteristics of the present challenge. My job as the tutor is to facilitate and guide this process in a friendly manner that sufficiently reduces any reluctance to take in new information. This new information often take several forms: gaps in knowledge, counterproductive emotional response patterns, distorted personal narratives, historical precedents, you name it. Once a student really sees these elements for what they are, and how they presently connect to quality of learning—or lack of quality—the gestalt tutoring is under way, and real growth is suddenly more available.

Do I call it Gestalt tutoring when I am supporting these insights? No, my students are much more likely to hear me using the phrase “collecting data” when I encourage them to stay with and explore whatever part of the learning experience is emerging for them in the present moment. I guide them to collect data about exactly what comes up as they try to move forward in the tutoring session. As with Gestalt counseling, Gestalt tutoring banks on *the proven power of devotedly noticing one's present experience* for the sake of expanding one's options and abilities in relation to any challenge. Implied in this approach is the idea that our limits and plateaus are often the result of overly managing contact with the totality of our experience. As I make it safe enough for my students to own more of the hard parts,

they gain traction and improve. It also helps that each personal discovery by my students provokes genuine excitement in their tutor. Yippee! That way they see that discoveries, even the tough ones, are also sweet freedom.

The elephant in the room doesn't have a leg to stand on!